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# LUCY AYLMER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE CURATE OF OVERTON.”

If thou do ill; the joy fades, not the pains :  
If well; the pain doth fade, the joy remains.

GEORGE HERBERT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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## LUCY AYLMER.

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### CHAPTER I.

They surprised  
His easy nature; took him when his heart  
Was soften'd by their blandishments.  
They wrought him to their purposes!

MORE'S SACRED DRAMAS.

Two years had passed away since that summer whose bright sunshine saw Lady Flora and Lucy's wedding-days. Two years! It seemed a long time to look forward, but it soon glided by. Spring flowers put forth their pure and lovely blossoms, faded and died; summer roses filled the air with their perfume and passed away; the long grass grew, and the mowers scythe went over it; the swallows made their nests beneath the

portico of the old Manor House, watched their young, then emigrated again to southern shores. The bells of St. Walburga rang marriage peals and funeral knells; old men were carried to their rest beneath the silent yew, and infants were brought to the font in baptism; and the weeks went spinning, spinning on.

Time had made a few changes in Forsted; but Squire Neville was still the same. No grey yet sprinkled his brown hair; his cheek still wore its ruddy hue, and he rode his swift horse and tally-hoed after the hounds with all his wonted zest. Maude had grown handsomer, more brilliant; but continued as light-hearted and careless as of old. Augusta Neville abode at the Manor—that was one change. Another was at Castle St. Agnes. Poor old mansion, its pride and glory seemed departed; closed shutters and empty rooms gave it a most dismal appearance; and the ancient house-keeper, and her few maidens professed to lead a solitary life. All the family were abroad, and had not been near St. Agnes since the day after Lady Flora's departure, when the

Countess had left suddenly, ordering the greater part of the furniture, ornaments and pictures to be sent to the Hall in Essex, rebuilt for their use, but now, like Castle St. Agnes, tenantless.

St. Walburga's bells rang a great deal—for every saint had his especial day kept, and St. Walburga's priest did strange things during the service, not mentioned in the Prayer-book, which some folks liked and some grumbled at. Ever bright, serene and changeless, was the little wife at the Parsonage gate, on a July evening, wearing a plain white dress and some wild flowers wreathed in and out her fair hair—holding on one arm a bright, sunny child, while with her right hand she pushed open the gate and looked down the lane, with its shady overhanging trees and clear rippling pond at the end. There was a delicious fragrance of new-mown hay in the air, and some nightingales were singing and answering each other's song most melodiously.

The little wife seemed very happy, and laughed at her baby, and shook flowers in his face, which the bright one year old boy

crowed and snatched at with all his might. After a little while, Lucy shut the gate and sauntered out into the lane, and culled wild flowers and threw them over her baby's little fair, shining head, who opened wide his bright blue eyes in the extent of his glee, and looked vastly like the Squire. Numbers of bright moths flew past, and swarms of knats which Lucy flapped away with the flowers—there was a lovely evening glow over everything, and the old weather-cock on the church-spire, glittered like gold. Hay-makers and farming men slowly plodded home from their work, making respectful bows to Lucy, and smiling as they passed at the pretty child, who looked back at them over her shoulder. Lucy stopped to one old man, very bent and aged, and spoke kindly and familiarly to him; and she put the baby's soft fair hand in his hard wrinkled one. The old man was Robbins, the Manor House gardener.

When Lucy turned away from him, she suddenly caught sight of a well-known figure in the distance, and calling merrily, “Harry look—there's papa!” hurried nimbly along to meet him.



Robert dusty and tired, and making use of his walking-stick, brightened up when he saw the white little figure coming towards him, and forgot his long walk when her voice greeted him, her lips pressed his, and the rosy little Harry was taken in his arms, danced, caressed—and then with his little wife linked to his arm, the country parson went to his home, happy on that July eve.

“Have you any news to tell me, Robert?” Lucy asked as they went along.

“Nothing of any moment. Your uncle is canvassing most actively, and giving dinners by the dozen.”

“Do you think he will get in?”

“He has every chance of success. Whenever did you know him fail in any undertaking?”

“I hope he will succeed for poor Flora’s sake. Did you hear anything of her when you were in London?”

“I saw her, my dear, in her very elegant barouche, driving towards the Park.”

“How did she look?”

“Her costume was surpassingly elegant; but if you ask after personal looks—she more

resembled a dressed-up dead creature, than anything else."

Lucy sighed deeply.

"She did not see me," Robert went on. "I was crossing Bond Street, and on the opposite side strangely enough, at the same moment, Lord Glendowan was passing—you should have seen his look as he bowed to her—the most unfeigned pity! I did not watch Flora; but I should think she has lived long enough to repent bitterly her rejection of that good-hearted fellow."

"Do you imagine Uncle Archer is kinder to her now?"

"Lady Tyrrell called him a 'brute,' in speaking to me. So you may draw your own conclusions."

Lucy shuddered. "He so soon changed towards her; yet he loved her so deeply at first. I am sure that was not feigned."

"My dear Lucy, you do not understand the whole thing. In the first place, your Uncle has a vile temper of his own: he never showed it to his sister. I think he stood in awe of her; but was there ever a better person on whom to vent all his humours, than his

wife—a weak-minded, complaining creature. Everything that goes wrong is sure to be visited on her ; and instead of showing some independent spirit, she implores and caresses ; and finally, when this fails, she goes off into fits of misery, and keeps her room for days, until she is dragged out rouged and decorated, to do the noble lady for him at some dinner either at home or abroad.”

“What a dreadful life !”

“Still it is true ; and in the second place, he is disappointed. In marrying into the family of De Walden, he expected to mount on their greatness ; instead of which the Lady Flora Erresford’s friends refused to visit the Lady Flora Tyrrell ; and her family showed pride enough to make the man hate the whole set.”

“But still, Uncle Archer had such a wide circle of his own. It surely might have contented him.”

“Nothing would satisfy his ambition. If he could possess the whole world, he would, like Alexander, sit down and weep, because there was no more to win. The fact is, your Uncle aimed too high. He fancied he would

rise on his wife's rank, and she was just the very woman to be retiring and shrinking, instead of pushing into, and seeking those circles to which, by her birth, she was entitled."

"It is an unhappy story," said Lucy; "and yet some persons, who cannot see behind the scenes, would envy Flora's position."

"Cecil is in a great state of mind about her. I never knew him so indignant."

"Because of her marriage, Robert?"

"No, not he! Provided a man is a gentleman, and honourable, and right-minded, he never cares about rank. But no fellow likes to see his sister so bullied and trampled on. I know I should not."

"It must be a great drawback to his pleasure in returning home. How does he look?"

"Oh! he is a glorious fellow—better and handsomer than all the world beside! He asked many questions about you and his godson, and sent remembrances and messages by wholesale."

"And has Lord De Walden benefited by his long absence?"

"I assure you, my dear, he has become quite reasonable and agreeable, only he rather bored me with American anecdotes. He spoke in glowing terms of his brother when Cecil was out of the way, and told me he owed to Erresford his restoration of mind and body."

"Good Cecil!" exclaimed Lucy.

"A-propos of good folks, I met Mostyn in the course of my London rambles—he talks of coming here for a few weeks. Noble fellow! he always reminds me of St. Augustine, or one of the early fathers of the church."

Lucy made no remark, and Robert continued:

"I wish Lucy, darling, you liked him better."

"I should respect him if he were a Roman Catholic," said Lucy gravely.

"That is bigotry, Lucy bird. He is a noble son of the Anglican Church; and long may he continue in it."

"But, dear Robert, if he were only less narrow-minded and less rigid in his doctrines?"

"Narrow-minded! why, Lucy, his mind is capable of grasping the universe!" Robert exclaimed.

"Oh! I know he is very clever. I did not

mean that, but then he has no spirit of toleration except towards Catholics."

"You do not understand him, Lucy, or you would appreciate him as highly as I do."

"He is so different from Cecil," Lucy said gently.

"It is possible to admire extremes, Lucy. The only fault in Cecil is, that his views are too general."

Lucy looked puzzled.

"Do not look so solemn, little Lu. Cecil and you might be stauncher members of the Anglican Church, that is all I meant to infer; but that will come by and bye, when old familiar prejudices are worn off."

"I do not think mine ever will be, Robert dear," said Lucy smiling.

"Well, never mind about that now. When Mostyn comes, we will waive controversies for your sake, dear little woman!"

Robert opened the gate, and Lucy skipped across the lawn, forgetting her Anglican membership, in the delights of surprising Robert with some improvements she had been making in his study, during his absence. Robert pronounced her the "best little wife in the

world!" and happily they sat down to take tea in the sunny parlour, with its glass-doors open, letting in a perfume of jessamine and honeysuckle, with which the verandah was trained.

The weeks glided by very smoothly with Lucy. Maude and she were as much together as before her marriage, and the Squire played *con amore* his part of grandpapa to the vicarage baby. The child was a ludicrous likeness of himself, and though named "Harry Cecil," after Robert's father and Erresford, the Squire persisted in calling him "Little Phil," to the no small amusement of Maude.

The Squire's economical resolutions had soon vanished—his old habits were too deeply rooted to be eradicated, and he hunted and betted with all his former *gusto*, encouraged, though under a semblance of regret, by his brother, from whom he had been compelled to borrow another loan, and thus had the mortgage become heavier over the old house and property.

At first, Maude had been troubled by this; but she never mentioned her anxiety to Lucy, and not having Cecil near to give her

warning and advice, her light-heartedness soon made her forget it, on the plan of the old proverb—"What can't be cured, &c."

It was on one of her father's hunting mornings, shortly after the conversation between Robert and Lucy, just related, that Maude came in to see Lucy, whom she found busily engaged in the domestic occupation of preparing fruit for preserving. Maude threw off her bonnet and gloves, and commenced helping her sister, seating herself on the floor, with a series of baskets around her. "I say, little Lu, I came in this morning especially to condole with you," Maude began.

"About what, my dear girl? I was not aware I needed condolence," said Lucy, laughing.

"I declare Lucy, you are a philosopher. Robert told me yesterday evening, when I encountered the young man in the fields, that he is about to inflict on you the society of that attenuated morsel of holiness—Hubert Mostyn!"

"Did he say that?" exclaimed Lucy.

"He did not use my form of speech, of



course ; but he gave me to understand the holy brother meditates a descent on your retirement."

"You must come and help me entertain him, Maude."

"My very dear little child, I came with the express purpose of desiring you to hoist a handkerchief from the top window in intimation of his arrival, that I may avoid the house. Let *black* be the signal of his presence—*white* of his departure ; then I shall return in peace, and learn a detailed account of the miseries inflicted on you during his residence at the jessamine-covered elysium.

"Now, Maude, it will be very shabby of you if you desert me—you have no idea how difficult he is to entertain. Everything seems to go wrong when he is here, and he walks about with his eyes cast down, that he is perpetually stumbling."

Maude laughed merrily. "He will be falling over poor little Harry, and crushing him."

"Oh ! I shall be obliged to send Harry up to you, for he cannot endure children."

"The wretch !" exclaimed Maude ; "and if

the truth were told, I do not think he feels much love for you."

"He thinks Robert did wrong in marrying," replied Lucy.

"No doubt; the gentleman wanted to add another to the class 'fools,' to which he himself belongs," Maude said in a comical tone.

"He always had an eye to Robert for St. Margaret's brotherhood," Lucy answered; "he told Robert so one day."

"If I had been Mrs. Robert, instead of you, you meek little thing—I should just have made St. Hubert acquainted with my sentiments on the subject."

"He never attends to what women say—he regards us as a species of nonentity."

"Nasty creature! I think I shall come every day and tease him, till I have made his life so wretched, that he speedily departs. No, a better thought has struck me. I know he eschews matrimony—I will pretend to be vastly in love with him!" Maude jumped up in her glee, and overturning a basket of gooseberries, sent them rolling about the floor.

Lucy laughed brightly at Maude's disaster, and refused to assist her in her perambulations over the carpet in search of the truant fruit.

"That comes of making fun of my husband's friend," said Lucy. "I really am ashamed of myself."

"I like it," replied Maude. "You may depend, if *my* husband brings home friends without my approval, I shall not spare my criticisms. But then I never shall arrive at being such a piece of propriety as you are! When does St. Hubert make his appearance?"

"To-morrow afternoon. Robert goes to Branstone to meet him."

"I am going to try a new horse to-morrow; and I might as well ride through Branstone as in any other direction. The meeting will be worth seeing."

"Oh! don't, Maude! It is very wicked of you!" said Lucy, trying not to laugh.

"I cannot help it, my dear, if it is; and I shall come in my most killing dress to-morrow evening and take tea with you. I shall count on being regaled with strawberries and cream."

“ Oh ! to-morrow is Friday ; and Mr. Mostyn always fasts. Breakfast is his only meal.”

“ Miserable young man ! ” exclaimed Maude, throwing up her hands. “ Well, never mind, I will make him break through his rules.”

“ Oh, Maude ! don’t do anything absurd for Robert’s sake,” said Lucy, anxiously.

“ Let me alone, Lu. If we do not expose the young man’s follies, we shall have Robert plunging into the fraternity himself.”

“ Oh, dear ! Maude ! what dreadful nonsense you talk ! You will be dubbing me a sister next ; and then what is to become of Harry ? ”

“ A future brother ! Let me see, was there ever a saint Harry in the calendar ? ” Here Maude spied the child in the garden with his nurse, and darted out to have some gambols with him on the lawn. Lucy went on quietly and diligently with her household duties, that she might be able to give her undivided attention to her husband’s guest when he arrived. True to his time, the four o’clock train deposited Hubert Mostyn at Branstone. True to her playful threat, Maude mounted on a beautiful horse, rode by the station, just

as the attenuated, bent form of the young devotee was entering a fly. Maude drew up her horse, spoke saucily to Robert, shook hands with Mostyn, made friendly enquiries after his health, regretted seeing him look so ill. Then, with an *au revoir* till the evening, when she counted on the pleasure of meeting again, she rode on, with a speed that astonished her groom, who was lost in amazement at "that there rum gentleman."

Little Lucy Aylmer was ready to receive Hubert on his arrival, having banished her baby to the care of the Miss Perkins, who had carried "Master Aylmer" triumphantly off to spend the evening at the farm. Good Lucy! at the expense of her own pleasure, she determined Hubert's first evening should not be disturbed by little Harry's presence. She greeted Hubert kindly, then hastened to have a sumptuous tea spread beneath the elms on the lawn, hoping he would forget to fast that day. Every imaginable country dainty her thoughtfulness could devise, she prepared and placed with her own hands, and decorated with flowers to tempt the frail-looking guest, whose coming she had dreaded, but whose

first appearance called forth all the pitying feelings of that tender heart ; and she formed numberless plans for his comfort and happiness, trusting that his visit might bring a little bloom into his hollow, pallid cheeks, and some vigour into his form. He spent the two first hours after his arrival in Robert's study ; and when the bustle of preparation was over, Lucy sat patiently at the tea-table in her snowy white dress ornamented with a bouquet of blue nemophida, awaiting their arrival. But Maude was before them, and her roguish eyes danced with glee as she recounted to Lucy her afternoon's *rencontre*. She was dressed with unusual care—in a pink and white dress, a wreath of ivy round her dark hair. She told Lucy she had passed a whole hour studying head-dresses ; and ivy made the most effect.

Lucy was still admiring her beautiful sister, when Hubert Mostyn and her husband crossed the lawn. Maude rose ; welcomed Hubert to Forsted ; and, after watching where he would choose his place, established herself by his side. Robert looked rather uncomfortable ; and Hubert Mostyn devoutly fixed his large eyes

on the ground, with the resolute determination of not noticing the beautiful girl by his side.

Lucy dispensed tea and sweet smiles, and joined with Maude in pressing her home-made delicacies on the self-denying brother ; but not one morsel would he touch, though he looked fainting from his long fast. Lucy was so distressed, that actually the tears stood in her soft eyes ; and she was just beginning to hope he would not fall ill at the vicarage, and wonder if the Miss Perkins were taking good care of her baby, when the gate across the lawn swung to. Maude gave an exclamation of surprise, while the colour mounted up to her high forehead. With rapid strides, Cecil Erresford crossed the lawn after his long absence, looking so handsome and manly, that, as he passed Mostyn to greet the little wife, the brother of St. Margaret's seemed crushed beneath the weight of his shadow. Cecil looked around beamingly upon them all ; begged them not to disturb their happy circle ; and when all the greetings were gone through, he sat down amongst them. He seemed much pleased to find himself there

again ; and not even Hubert's automaton presence disconcerted him. Maude entirely abandoned her meditated flirtation with Robert's friend, and relapsed into what was, for her, great quietude ; until Cecil turned and related peculiarly to her a number of Yankee anecdotes, when all her vivacity returned. And Hubert Mostyn was heard to sigh—perhaps over his own youth's brightness which had fled and gone for ever, crushed by the false austerities of his life. Suddenly, Cecil looked around, and asked Lucy where she kept his godson.

“In exile !” replied Maude, “Lu, let me go and fetch him.”

Lucy looked at Hubert appealingly ; but those large grey eyes rested ever on the ground.

“Mr. Mostyn, my sister has imbibed an idea that you do not like children,” Maude began, in spite of Robert's remonstrating looks.

Hubert Mostyn said he was extremely sorry—he seemed addressing the grass. Would he object if Maude fetched her little nephew ?



Hubert told the grass he should be glad to see him. That was all Maude needed, and in two minutes more, she was going towards the gate. Cecil inspired by some sudden resolution, rushed after her ; and down the shady lane they went, side by side, the sun shining in among the interlaced branches of the trees on Maude's head and its long ivy wreath. Lucy looked longingly after them, as she poured Hubert out his sixth cup of tea, and became convinced he was going to have a fever. Cecil gazed admiringly at the blooming Maude, and regretted, with great gallantry, that he had not an umbrella to hold over her. Maude declared she liked the sun, then asked how he thought Lucy looked.

"Exactly as I left her," he replied. "It will take many, many years to alter the depth of calmness and peacefulness on that sweet face ; but what can induce Robert to bring that eccentric being to his house ?"

"Oh ! he is a peculiar pet of Robert's. I think he venerates him as much as Lady Anne did."

"I hoped he had given up that set. I cannot see what he wants with them."

“Robert is soaring slightly high himself,” replied Maude, laughing at the grave expression on Cecil’s face. Cecil turned towards her anxiously as she spoke. “Oh! do not look alarmed,” Maude said. “Robert does no harm; he only perpetrates a few peculiarities in church sometimes. The people have become accustomed to them, and those who still dislike them go elsewhere.”

“Ah! has it come to that?” said Cecil, gravely. “I always said Mostyn was a bad companion for him. But where are we going, Miss Neville?”

“To Perkins’ farm. Lucy made over little Harry to the girls for the evening, for fear Mr. Mostyn should betake himself to fainting at the sight of the child.” Maude fancied Cecil muttered Mostyn’s name in connection with the word ‘fool,’ but she was not certain.

“Does Mrs. Aylmer like Mostyn?” Cecil asked.

“She endures him,” Maude replied.

“Ah! I thought so. I must look to Robert. I cannot let him take up with that set: he is much too good for them.”

“So I tell him ; but he thinks Mr. Mostyn is akin to perfection !” said Maude.

“Robert is ten times the better fellow of the two : but how goes it with your father ?”

“Oh, papa is always bonnie ! he has gone to Dyke Moor to-day ;” then recalling to mind Cecil’s advice two years ago, she added, “papa cannot live without hunting—it is part of his nature.”

“Ah ! I suppose so ; but do you still accompany him sometimes, Miss Neville ?”

“I ? oh, no ! my first hunt was my last. I always remembered what you advised me, and have indeed never led papa to it, Mr. Erresford,” replied Maude, with the utmost frankness.

“I am glad to hear you say so,” was Cecil’s rejoinder. “How natural Forsted looks again, everything in *statu quo*, even the willow pond half dried up, as it always is at this time of the year,” he added.

“The Castle is very desolate,” said Maude. “Is it not going to be inhabited again ?”

“I fear my mother will never choose it as a residence. Neither she nor Anne has any wish to return.”

“Is it true, Lady Anne is going to enter the Roman Catholic Church?” Maude asked, but repented the question immediately after, for Cecil’s pleasant expression changed to one sadly grave, as he replied :

“I hope it is only report ; but neither of my sisters reposes any confidence in me.” Cecil threw back his head as if to relieve himself from a weight of care—then returned his own peculiar smile, and Maude thought among the many people she had seen, none were so handsome as he !

Perkins’ farm was before them, a great low, gable-ended building, with an air of snugness and comfort about it, and a trim garden in the front, at the gate whereof, two damsels smartly attired were standing, one dancing a baby at the other. The instant they caught sight of Cecil, both disappeared with a marvellous rapidity which set Maude laughing ; however, when Cecil was ushered into the best parlour, after a little delay, the young ladies made their appearance, as if they had not been seen before, blushing and simpering, and very much disappointed at losing “Master Aylmer,” whom Cecil carried

back to the vicarage; the Miss Perkins watching his tall figure side by side with Maude; and the short Miss Perkins tiptoeing over her sister's shoulder, was heard more than once to call it "a case." Though what she meant by this expression, was best known to herself. But Cecil Erresford thought the remainder of that evening, that it was a "case" to be sorry for—that his dear friend and former *protégé* should have fallen into the hands of Hubert Mostyn.

It seemed fated that people should become ill at the vicarage. Not two years before, Lady Flora had passed weeks there between life and death, and was only restored through the careful nursing of Lucy Aylmer.

Now, Hubert Mostyn, completely broken in health, by the long years of austerities, and suffering from an intermittent fever, instead of three weeks, was detained as many months under Robert's roof.

The young vicar was unremitting in his attention to his guest; indeed, so much time did he devote to reading, conversing, and otherwise amusing his sick friend, that the little wife began to grow dull and miss his

society. In these autumn months was also the beginning of an occasional sadness, which almost in spite of herself, crept over her. No one noticed it but Cecil, and he traced it to its source—the source from whence sadness should least have come to the little wife—her husband !

Ah ! the brother of St. Margaret's had fallen ill at Forsted to some purpose. He had taught Robert to fast on Fridays as well as himself ; he had taught Robert to observe a rigid formality of speech and manner, greatly at variance with his natural temperament ; he had taught him to be reserved to his little wife !

Hubert Mostyn thought nothing of Lucy's religion. Austere, it certainly was not—formal it was not—but conscientiously she fulfilled her duty towards all—even to her husband's strange guests ; and for Robert, she ever wore the serenest smiles, ever had the most winning words. And surely his home was very sweet to him ; it was always wont to be so. But time rapidly sped on, and Hubert was taken back convalescent to St. Margaret's by Robert, who remained with the fraternity nearly a week, and returned home looking

very tight and straight in his dress, and bereft of the brown curls which gave such a boyish, pleasing look, to his refined countenance. Lucy wept in secret over the curls, but not one word of remark did she make to Robert—nay, she even gravely took his part, when Maude laughed at him.

The Squire seemed very much perturbed in mind, having become possessed of the idea, that Robert was meditating something that would be of harm to Lucy, either enrolling himself among St. Margaret's brotherhood, or else leaving the Protestant church altogether. Therefore it was that the Squire remonstrated with his son-in-law, but to no effect. The Sunday after his return from St. Margaret's, Robert intoned the whole service in a way which utterly spoiled his hitherto clear and audible voice. He thought proper likewise to read the Litany every morning at the unheard-of hour of half-past seven; after which he called together the village boys, and selected ten with the best voices and trained in the art of chanting, and had them clothed as choristers. The children had learnt nicely

under Lucy's pleasant tuition the usual chants, for since Lady Anne's departure she had taken them in hand. But when it came to the whole of the psalms and an anthem besides, there happened a dreadful break down—a general titter ran round the church, which so abashed the newly formed choir, that they resolutely declined all share in the vocal part of the service, which again fell to Lucy's management.

Poor Lucy! for the first time her husband found fault with her singing, and called it a conventicle style! disapproved altogether of the choice of her tunes—and begged the loan of some of the choristers from St. Margaret's for one Sunday, to let the congregation know what real church music was. And certainly the effect was sweet—the low, melodious voices and perfect time. But one or two poor people told Lucy afterwards so much singing spoiled the prayers, and they did not dare join themselves in such fine music! All the complaints were poured upon Lucy; as if, sweet child, she could help her husband being led into absurdities by Hubert



Mostyn, who was prompted by Lady Anne, under the plea of having the welfare of Forsted at heart.

Cecil Erresford saw Robert's changes with regret, and expostulated with him in his kindest way; but Robert's only reply was, he felt convinced he was doing right; and daily did Forsted's vicar become more changed.

## CHAPTER II.

She neither weeps,  
Nor sighs, nor groans ; too strong her agony  
For outward sign of anguish, and for prayer  
Too hopeless was the ill ; and though, at times,  
The pious exclamation past her lips,  
Thy will be done ! Yet was that utterance  
Rather the breathing of a broken heart,  
Than of a soul resigned.

SOUTHEY.

CHRISTMAS had come round again with a depth of snow hitherto almost unheard of in the annals of Forsted. There were great drifts on the hill-sides, wherein, if any one fell, they stood a good chance of never emerging ; and every pond in the neighbourhood was frozen inches deep.

Maude was learning to skate on the Castle lake with Cecil Erresford as her in-

structor—he was frequently at Forsted now. Lucy sometimes came to look on, and was persuaded by Maude to venture a few steps on the ice; but Lucy's interest in country pastimes had gone; her whole soul was wrapped up now in the extraordinary change which had taken place in her husband. Six months had turned the once happy, light-hearted Robert into a gloomy ascetic.

He had enrolled himself among the brotherhood of St. Margaret's, as a sort of out member; and two or three days of each week were spent away from the two whose interests ought to have been nearest his heart—his parish and his wife. The former murmured and rebelled, threatened to appeal to the Bishop; the latter quietly bore the first trials that had ever dawned on that young heart. She who had comforted Lady Flora, needed comfort now herself; but it came not. Complaints she heard on all sides without having one truthful vindication to offer in favour of her husband. Her only refuge was silence.

Thus it came about that the holy season of Christmas was not a happy one to Lucy Aylmer; for though her father's love and

Maude's were dear to her, no earthly thing could compensate for her husband's frequent absence, and shrinking from her when at home.

It was Twelfth Night, and Lucy had refused to join a party at Friarsford, because her husband, who was then at St. Margaret's, had promised to return that evening. On leaving Lucy, two or three days before, he had shown some of his former warmth, and the little wife felt hopeful.

She made a large cheerful fire in her comfortable drawing-room, drew closely the warm red curtains ; and placing her husband's chair by the fire, and his slippers in the fender, she sat down to her work by the table. Having turned up the lamp, and sent a general brightness through the room, Lucy looked around to see if everything wore a pleasant aspect to cheer her dear traveller on entering ; and even her neat eye was satisfied. Lucy herself wore a new dress of Robert's favourite colour, light blue, to surprise him—and her soft shining hair was arranged with more than usual care ; and the little wife's unruffled sweetness of countenance ought to have been

an attraction to a husband coming from the dreary St. Margaret's Priory and gloomy brotherhood.

Little Harry slept peacefully in his nursery ; and Lucy was occupied braiding a pelisse for him of the same material as her pretty bright dress ; and as she worked, she sang low to herself old familiar songs, which carried her back to the past, with all its sweet recollections—the first seventeen years of her life, how radiant, how unclouded, all gladdened by the intense love of her father and Maude. Then came the devotion of her husband, and the joyousness of her first two years of wedded life—her every wish, her every heart's desire fulfilled—and all in all to her were her husband and her little child. But after this clouds came one by one on the horizon of her happiness, and by-and-bye they condensed and hung heavily over her head—but as yet not one had burst ! Her own sweet patience, trust and love had warded them off ; and each day she lived in hope that they would disperse, and restore to her her former bright life. She often said to herself, “when the night is darkest, the stars shine forth ;” and though

the stars were long in coming, she never ceased in untiring patience to look for them.

Ah! as she drew back the curtain that the light might meet her weary husband's eye, she was a star herself; yet she shone in the firmament of her holiness and goodness, like a beacon from which the traveller turns his gaze and will not see the steady, unwavering light, which might, otherwise, have saved him from the quicksands.

Lucy Aylmer worked on; sang on; only occasionally stopping to go to the window and peer out into the darkness—but no Robert came. She grew anxious—it was Saturday night, and he never failed to come home for his Sunday duty. Lucy went to the hall door: a gust of wind howled and danced around her in a kind of wild fury, and drove snow flakes against her. She could see nothing but the tall elm on the lawn, looking like a great white ghost—she could hear nothing but the heavy, dull sound of the storm, as it were grinding the air. She shook and trembled with cold; and shutting the door against the wind, which battled with

her, she went back to her solitude, and wondered where her beloved Robert was. The tea-things had been on the table nearly three hours ; it would soon be nine o'clock, the time the last train from Ackington reached Branstone.

Lucy tried to be calm and quiet for another hour, making allowances for the depth of snow and the difficulty of travelling. But the minutes passed on and on, slowly, draggingly to the little wife longing, hoping, fearing for her absent husband. At ten o'clock, Lucy was worked up to a kind of quiet despair, and went up to the nursery. Her child slumbered on in sweet unconsciousness of his mother's anxiety ; she bent over him, and kissed him as he slept. The nurse who was working by the fire, said in a tone of alarm :

“What ever can have come to master to-night, ma'am?”

“The snow is so very deep, the train may have been delayed,” Lucy said ; “but he has never been so late before, though last Saturday it was equally stormy.”

“There may not be any flys out to-night,” the nurse suggested.

“I think I shall put on my thick cloak, and go up to the Manor House. I know papa would send the dog-cart to Branstone.”

“Lor, ma’am! why you would be blown away!” exclaimed the nurse, eyeing her mistress’s slight little figure with a look of alarm.

“I must do something,” Lucy said. “I feel as if I could not bear this suspense.”

“Oh, but ma’am! I could not hear of your going out. You’d be blown down in the snow and buried there!” the nurse said in a tone of respectful authority.

Lucy stood looking at the fire some minutes in silence, then slowly went away. Resolute in her purpose, she wrapt herself up in a large cloak, whose hood she turned over her head; then enveloping her feet in snow-boots, lantern in hand, noiselessly the little wife glided out from her warm, snug house, into the snow storm.

It was such a dreadful night, she dared not ask her servants to go out; but she thought



no weather too bad to brave for the husband, who neglected and shunned her. With all her strength, she baffled against the storm, twice falling in the snow before she reached her own gate. Though men had been employed all day in clearing the lane, the snow had collected ankle deep since dark ; but on went the brave Lucy holding before her the glimmering lantern, and praying as she went for her misguided husband.

The Squire was snoring by the fire in his arm-chair, after his evening's jorum of brandy and water. Maude sat on the hearth-rug reading a very horrid story, with the wind howling discordantly down the wide old chimney, when the house bell rang faintly. Some one was on the point of being murdered in Maude's book ; and at the low, mysterious bell, she started up, thinking it part of the book, not reality, so unusual was the sound at that late hour, and in such a dreadful night. Stillness succeeded the ring, and Maude returned to her book, determining it to be imagination, when again the bell sounded louder than before. The Squire's snoring suddenly came to an end, but he continued

to sleep heavily. Maude darted up, and opening the door a little way, peeped through it. She watched Morris cross the hall, heard him with tiresome slowness withdraw the bolts and bars of the ponderous door; she saw him start back with surprise, when a little figure white from head to foot and holding in one hand an extinguished lantern, dropped breathlessly down on a chair. In an instant, Maude had darted forward and knelt on the floor at her sister's feet, exclaiming: "Oh, my darling child!" Lucy smiled on her, but could not speak for some minutes. "My poor dear," Maude went on in an indignant tone, as she pulled off her sister's heavy cloak and wet boots, "my darling! what is the matter?" Lucy gasped painfully for breath, then came the words uttered in a tone of misery.

"He has not come home!"

"Sweetest, he is not here," Maude replied.

"We must send," Lucy said. "Where is papa?"

Rubbing his eyes, and only half awake, the Squire stood on the threshold of the drawing-

room, gazing dreamily at his young daughters : presently he exclaimed, " Bless my heart alive ! Lucy bird, what brought you here ? "

" Oh, papa ! Robert has not come home," Lucy replied, as she put her arm round Maude's neck, and rested her head on her shoulder.

" I wish that Priory would all come to rack and ruin ! What on earth do men make such fools of themselves for ? "

" Oh, papa it is the storm ! depend upon it, it is the storm. He never remained away yet on Sunday."

" Not come to that yet ! " grumbled the Squire ; " and so you, precious little thing, walked all through the snow to enquire after that good-for-nothing husband of yours ! " The Squire took her up in his arms, and carrying her into the drawing-room deposited her in his arm-chair.

Lucy looked bewildered and said meekly, " Do not think of me, papa ! think of him. He may be lost in the snow ! "

" I suppose you want me to go and look for him. He is not worthy of such a wife ! When I was a young man, I would have

blown my brains, out, sooner than desert *my* Lucy as he does *his* !”

Maude made signs that he was only distressing Lucy, who said in her gentle tones of ready excuse, “Dear papa, he has never left me one Sunday yet. He must be at Branstone, perhaps even now walking home. Oh, it is such a dreadful night !”

“And yet my poor little girl walked through it all. Bless my heart alive, how you tremble ! Well, I’ll go to Branstone, if we can get a horse to drag us along through the snow. Now keep yourself quiet, my pretty one ; and if he is to be found, I’ll bring him home.”

Lucy poured thanks upon her father, who muttered when he got out into the hall, “the young rascal—to desert her like this !” Lucy saw her father off, well covered with wraps, and watched the dog-cart drive slowly away, shivering and trembling, till Maude made her come back to the fire and the arm-chair, where after listening eagerly for sounds, she at length, fell asleep. Maude sat silently watching the child-like face, a half-dried tear on her cheek, and an expression of re-

signation on her sweet countenance, sad, yet beautiful to behold; and Maude's proud lip curled, and she looked fiery enough to fight a host of Roberts. And then again, she glanced at her fair young sister, trials gathering around her so soon; and though Maude struggled against them, tears of grief and anger swelled in her large dark eyes.

Lucy did not sleep long; the sound of the house bell awoke her. One of the servants from the Vicarage had come up to see after her mistress. Lucy hoped it was to tell of Robert's arrival, and a shade of great disappointment came across her sad face, when she learnt the real cause of the servant's arrival. Maude piled up fresh wood in the broad chimney, down which the wind kept on sighing and whistling.

Lucy wanted to go to the door, and again look out; but Maude insisted on her remaining by the fire. So, restless and anxious, the little wife sat down on a footstool and laid her head wearily on Maude's lap, and talked in a low voice of the probability of her husband passing the night at Acking-

ton, and coming home by an early train, in time for morning service. Then again she fancied he was somewhere in the snow: the drifts were so deep, and it was impossible to walk many steps together, she said, without falling.

Maude praised her heroism for venturing out, while she scolded her playfully for being so rash. Lucy said, she could not think of herself while he was out. Maude only wished Robert were as thoughtful of her happiness—he would not remain away so long at that wretched Priory.

The fire went on burning with low, hissing sounds, as each fresh piece of wood caught the dying flame of the last. There was an intense, almost woeful silence throughout the house; and outside at intervals, the dogs set up dismal howlings. The old clock, on its tall pedestal in the hall, ticked loudly and monotonously, and the two young sisters sat alone in the great room with its dark pannelled pictures, over which deep shadows fell and sent a gloom along the walls. Maude absolutely shuddered as she called to mind the horrid parts of the story she

had been reading, and longed for something to break the stillness.

Lucy's heart beat with fear, but very different from that of Maude's. The howlings of the dogs, the ticking of the great clock, the shadows were to her as if they did not exist; every nerve was strained in acute anxiety for her husband's return. She had relapsed into watchful silence, except when now and then, she uttered the words: "Hark! what is that?" in a low, anxious voice that made Maude long for some pretext to ring the bell for Morris; but shame at her own fears kept her still, looking down on the fair head resting on her lap.

And so died out the week's last day; and even St. Walburga's twelve distinct chimes following each other slowly, had something awful in them.

Lucy started. Maude was growing terribly nervous, and was thinking over the murder scene in her book.

"Maude, dear, it is Sunday morning," Lucy said.

"Yes, darling! does not the fire want replenishing?"

"No, dear, the large log is not half burnt out."

"Had I not better ring for some candles—the lamp is going out?" said Maude.

"It cannot be, dear. Morris wound it up just after I came in—oh! Maude, this is a sad commencement of Sunday morning!"

"The day may terminate better than it begins, sweet."

"Oh! I hope it will. I wish I could trust more. I know God will guide my Robert's feet wherever it is safest, and yet I do feel anxious."

"It is natural, love; but depend upon it, the brothers have persuaded Robert to remain at the Priory."

"Not unless he is ill. The out-brothers who have duty, always leave. And Robert's party are so punctual, so regardless of health and everything secular!"

"But, dear Lucy, think of the weather. This night is one in a thousand."

"It is—it is!" Lucy murmured. "Oh! if he were only what he was, then I could bear it better. But to lose him so, when he has gone all away from the real, only path—"



Lucy said this in a voice scarcely audible, and shuddered at her thoughts. Maude had no comfort to give, but Lucy continued : “ Maude, darling, do repeat a hymn to me, one we used to know long ago. I cannot bear my thoughts, they are so repining.”

Maude’s mind was so confused, she could remember nothing but the “ Evening Hymn ;” and just as she commenced it, the back door swung to, then the passage door, and the Squire’s well-known tread sounded on the floor.

Lucy started to her feet—her father was alone ! He was clapping his hands together to thaw them ; but when Lucy came out to him, he put his arms round her and kissed her, and said it was all right—the station-master assured him Mr. Aylmer had never passed the platform, and there was scarcely a passenger by any of the down trains.

“ Depend upon it, little woman, Bob and the holy brothers are fast asleep and snoring ; and Sunday’s train will bring him in all safe and sound.”


Lucy hoped so, and drew her father to

the fire, and kneeling down by him, warmed his hands.

“Lor bless me, if ever there was such a night!” said the Squire, “James and I had to take the reins alternately, while the other thawed his hands. It took me more than an hour to get to Branstone, and then the station gates were shut, and Billy Rogers put out his head in his night cap, and asked what was the row, in a regular growling tone. But when I said I came from Mrs. Aylmer, my eye! he came round mighty civil; he was an old admirer of yours, little Lu! I would rather marry a station-master than a parson. But, never mind, the parson will turn up all right soon. He’ll tire out of living on bread and vegetables, and praying all night long in some cold chapel.”

Lucy tried to smile, and Maude who was becoming sleepy, and thought there was a needless fuss about Robert, who must be quite safe at St. Margaret’s and would make his appearance on the morrow, made Lucy retire to rest, promising she should return home early in the morning. As soon as it was

light, Lucy was up. The storm had subsided and a severe frost hardened the snow. Lucy set forth home with a heavy heart—her first care was to send a messenger to Friarsford to beg Mr. Lewis to spare his curate, so that in case of Robert's non-arrival, everything might go on just as usual, and create no surprise. At eight, the church bells rang forth their early peal—reminding Lucy, strangely, sadly of her wedding-day, when her heart was so light and untroubled, she could have sung for joy ; and now, she might well have sat down and wept ! But she had no time to weep—she had more hope than the previous night—There was a bright sunshine spread over the earth glistening radiantly on the snow, and it seemed to send its rays into her heart. She prepared breakfast, sent a servant to the train, then waited patiently her husband's arrival. But the news of Robert's absence had spread country wise, all over the village ; and one person after another came up to the vicarage with enquiries after Mr. Aylmer, and if there was to be any service. Lucy had enough to do. The farmers expected an audience ; and Lucy's patience was sorely



tried by their idle questioning, to which her unvarying reply was, "Mr. Aylmer was doubtless detained by the storm; but that a substitute had been provided." About ten o'clock, Cecil Erresford made his appearance, not to ask questions: he understood it all instantly—but to volunteer a journey to St. Margaret's to learn the real state of the case, and, if possible, ease Lucy's mind—and his own too. For not commonly anxious was he at Robert's prolonged absence. Lucy did not know how to feel grateful enough to Cecil for his kindness. She thought now she should know all; and felt her heart less heavy when she saw him turn his horse's head towards Branstone. At a little before eleven, Lucy gave up every hope of Robert's appearing in time for service, and was not a little glad to see Mr. Lewis coming up the garden. Of course, he too wanted an explanation of Robert's absence, and looked grave enough on learning how many days he had been away at the Ackington brotherhood. His heart was full of pity for the patient enduring Lucy, and he took her under his especial protection to church. Lucy slid in through the vestry to

avoid meeting any of the villagers, and when alone in her own pew her forced calmness gave way, and she cried bitterly.

The new chaunts were ill sung without Robert to lead them ; and the children were all whispering among themselves conjectures as to what “our paarson had come to?” Mr. Lewis preached a very solemn sermon, the very opposite in doctrine to Robert’s sleepy high church discourses ; and the farmers nodded approvingly, and called it the “right sort of thing,” when they spoke with their neighbours in the churchyard after the service was over, and drew comparisons which were not much in Robert’s favour. All this Lucy heard, and had to hear. Poor little wife ! her husband seemed dearer to her now than he had ever been : she could think of nought else, though throughout dinner and till the quarter bells chimed for afternoon service, she tried to do her best in entertaining Mr. Lewis. Every one was very kind, scrupulously kind to Lucy : the farmers volunteered their services to go to St. Margaret’s to see after the parson ; and Lord De Walden, who was now a resident at the Castle, a quiet,

timid young man, sent to Lucy, asking whether he could be of any use to her? The Squire got a fit of restless indignation, and rode off to Branstone to meet Cecil—Maude came down to Lucy to accompany her to church.

But Lucy remained at home, anxiously awaiting Cecil, whom she expected to return about four o'clock. The Sunday bells rung out their peal; and when they had died away, and the villagers ceased flocking past her gate to church, Lucy fetched down her baby, and walked a little way along the road leading to Branstone, where the declining sun was shedding its parting rays. The road was silent and deserted, and no voices broke the stillness, but those of Lucy and her little child, who called in his eager baby voice, "Papa! papa!" The wind blew frostily along; and Lucy feared the cold for her child. Reluctantly she returned to her solitary home. Her pretty, snug drawing-room looked desolate. She drew Robert's arm-chair towards the fire, hoping almost against hope that Cecil would bring him back.

The sun set; darkness began to steal

forth. Little Harry slept soundly on a pile of cushions. Lucy shaded her face from the fire, and read the parable of the Prodigal Son out of the neglected Bible of her poor Robert, which she had given him long ago. It was a christening Sunday; there were several children to be baptised, and the congregation were late in coming home. A crescent moon rose faintly, and played on the sparkling snow. The trees on the lawn, cold and shrouded things, peeped in at the windows on that desolate young wife, who had fallen into a slumber whilst praying for her husband.

Slowly a horseman rode along Branstone Hill; and a great care was on his mind. The cold wind stole around him, and the frost looked bitterly at him. But neither did he notice; his thoughts were preoccupied with a strange, a startling theme. It haunts him as on he guides his horse along the slippery road, and gathers on him. It shades his brow as he enters the vicarage lane. The small crescent moon regards him in gentle wonder; but he thinks not of her. He leads his horse round to Farmer Perkins' stable,

and asks him to take care of it. He is assailed by a volley of questions, which he answers slowly, unsatisfactorily. The farmer watches him from over the gate, and beholds Cecil enters the vicarage—the farmer goes in, and imparts the news to his family. The short Miss Perkins becomes slightly hysterical, and sobs :

“ Oh ! our parson’s dead ! ”

There is very little light now in the vicarage windows ; and the snow scene without looks cruel in its whiteness. St. Walburga’s chimes have long since gone six ; and the farmers and labourers are comfortable by their fire-sides ; and at the cottages of the newly baptised infants, there are little friendly gatherings. There is a room at the vicarage where nothing has entered for the last half hour but the struggling beams of the full moon on the floor. There kneels a small, childish figure ; and a fair head, whereon fall the moonbeams, rests heavily against the side of the bed. Her hands are clasped above her head ; and she neither weeps nor prays. Something has fallen on her, and seems to crush her beneath its weight !



## CHAPTER III.

My flower, my blighted flower! thou that wert made  
For the kind fostering of sweet summer airs,  
How hath the storm been with thee!

HEMANS.

ROBERT AYLMER had left St. Margaret's at the usual hour. Hubert Mostyn assured Cecil, that he had gone with the intention of returning home; he had even misled the brotherhood. He had been seen by the station-master at Ackington, enter an up-train, after having taken a first-class ticket to London; he had been seen at Paddington, to alight: one of the porters formerly in Lord De Walden's service, had carried his carpet-bag for him to a cab—but beyond that the vicar of Forsted was not to be traced. Cecil left nothing untried. He

went himself to the Paddington Station, expressly to procure the last information: he wrote to various friends—made personal enquiries—but in vain.

The first shock of Lucy's grief, at finding her husband had deserted her, gradually subsided; and with an energy of which no one thought her capable, she suggested and planned various means, by which she imagined he might be traced. At last, an idea presented itself to her of discovering whether or no he had left England, by enquiring at the various consulates, if at such a period, a passport had been made out in his name.

Cecil highly approved of the thought, and at once started for London, where, after a little trouble, he ascertained Robert had received a passport for Paris, two days after his disappearance from Ackington. Gladly did Cecil communicate the intelligence to the Manor, where Lucy had removed; and without returning to the Castle, Cecil instantly started for Paris, and from Paris the unwearied friend traced from halting-place to halting-place Forsted's vicar, till at last Rome received him, as she has received many a once

good and devoted son of England's church, in this our nineteenth century. But at Rome Cecil's search suddenly came to an end, and weeks of untiring patience were expended but to no purpose. Neither in Rome, nor beyond Rome, was Robert to be heard of; his passport lay at the office, but his person was not traceable in church, promenade, hotel, or lodging. Was it possible the deluded young man had met with an early and untimely death? Every register was searched—Robert Aylmer still lived. The remainder of January and part February, Cecil passed in the city of Popery, whose crafts had blinded and deluded the friend whom Cecil sought, but sought in vain.

In February, he returned to his seat in Parliament, where the new member for Arminster, also astonished the House by his eloquence; the brothers-in-law were so different, so opposite, Cecil's upright cheerful looks outshining Archer's dark, cloudy brow, even as Archer's eloquence outshone his.

Lady Flora had written many a sympathising letter to Lucy, and Lucy had sent many a sympathising letter to Flora, who, with a hus-

band many envied, riches many longed after, rank, some would have given worlds to obtain, was yet even more to be pitied than Lucy.

Augusta Neville, was at May-Fair, by especial invitation, and was admired and sought after, still throwing the Lady Flora Tyrrell completely into the shade ; but Flora was glad she was there : her husband's temper was ever subdued by his sister's presence.

The Squire hunted on to drown the thought of his Lucy's sorrow, which was very grievous to him ; and he betted on and borrowed, until his last acre was in the power of his crafty brother. And Maude's life was devoted to Lucy and her little Harry. Lucy was sweet-tempered and mindful as ever of the happiness of others, but her lightness of spirit, and enjoyment of life was gone. She never laughed now, and few but her child called up her smiles ; she was like a flower early blighted by summer storm—and the Squire's handsome daughter grew so beautiful, so attractive, that she was the toast of the country, and many aspired eagerly after her. But all were refused, and it began to be rumoured that her sister's unhappiness had

set her against the thoughts of marrying. I wonder if the rumour were true?

March blew itself in, sunned itself out. April wept on the blossoms and trees, till May caught them from her tears, and laughed and smiled on them. June held a canopy of gold and azure o'er the earth, and brought bright tints then of many flowers—it brought too a tiny blossom into the old ancestral house of the Nevilles, which the parching, thirsty days of July saw brought to the font, and receive its father's name.

It was a frail little blossom, and very dear to its mother's heart; but when Augusta's harvest day came, and the earth rejoiced, the little Robert slept beneath the church's shade, and his mother strewed roses over his tiny grave. Thus eight months passed away since the stormy night when Robert forsook his wife, his child and his home. There was no new vicar appointed to Forsted. Cecil engaged a former tutor of his for a year to perform the duty, at the end of which time he hoped that something might be heard of Robert. The vicarage was unaltered; the

curate lived there, and took care of the house, which Lucy had never entered since that dreadful Sunday, when Maude came and carried her away.

It was early on an August evening. Lucy sat by the open window of the drawing-room at the Manor, working for the poor, while Maude read to her—their Aunt was absent, though the Manor was nominally her home, yet she seldom honoured it by her presence. The Squire had not yet returned from his hunt. A letter was brought to Lucy from the Castle : it was from Lord De Walden, enclosing one from his mother dated “Rome,” in which the Countess mentioned having met Mr. Aylmer many times at the Palace of the Marchesa Elmo, a friend of Lady Anne, and that Mr. Aylmer had become a Roman Catholic, which the Countess thought very shocking ! That was all she said on the subject. Maude watched attentively her sister’s countenance as she read and re-read the Countess’s letter to her son—at last, Lucy looked up with a smile on her face, brighter than had been there for many a long day.

“Maude dear, I am so thankful!” she exclaimed.

“For what, darling?” Maude asked eagerly.

“Oh! my prayers are answered now. I know where he is, and I can go to him!” Again her face glistened with some of its old brightness, as she gave the letter to her sister. Maude read it slowly, Lucy murmuring all the time.

“Oh, this is good news! this is good news!”

“But, my darling, you do not really think of going?” Maude exclaimed presently.

“Oh! Maude dear, yes! Think how solitary he must be. I dare say he is longing for me even now, and perhaps is afraid to ask me to come—dear Robert!” and her eyes glistened lovingly.

Maude looked at her sister, and a strange indefinable feeling shot through her, a sort of fear for Lucy, whose goodness seemed too pure, too exalted for this every day world.

“I shall take nurse and little Harry—how

pleased Robert will be with him ! and then," she added lowering her voice, " I can tell him of our darling in heaven."

" But, Lucy, papa will never allow you to go without some one to take care of you. We could not permit it indeed."

" You must not think me unkind, Maude, dearest sister, I would not appear so for the world ; but I can not have any one but little Harry. Robert might bear me—but, dearest, after all that has passed, other faces would seem like a reproach to him. I have not pained you, my Maude?"

" Sweetest, no ! I understand all you mean ; but the fatigue of travelling, and the loneliness ?"

" I could bear them both with such a reward at the end. Oh, Maude ! this is the brightest hour I have had for a long, long time !"

Maude tried not to sigh, but one of those forebodings of evil which sometimes haunt us, seemed to say, if Lucy parted from them, they might never meet again.

" Lucy, dear, the Countess does not mention



Robert's place of residence, or anything about it. We ought to write for farther information," Maude said in a persuasive tone.

"Lady De Walden, doubtless, knows where he lives. When I reach Rome, she will tell me all I wish to learn."

"But, my darling, you have never travelled alone before?"

"God will take care of me, wherever I am, my own dear ; I shall have no occasion to be afraid. You know I am pretty well acquainted with French and Italian, thanks to Aunt Augusta ; how often she used to tell us we should find our studies useful ; how little we dreamt then what this winter would bring ! but it is all for the best, and I dare say the day will come when I shall see it so."

"I trust the day will come when you will have your old happiness again, darling," Maude said fondly.

"I feel as if it were near. There is joy yet in store for me. I shall have it in meeting my Robert, and in making him happy—and, perhaps, keeping him from greater harm ; but my greatest hope," she added with much sweetness, "is that Robert may learn to love

the Bible again—and that he will learn to love me as he once did, in the days without a cloud—it seems difficult now ; but it may come about, and then—” The Squire’s horse trotted up the walk. Lucy heard the sound and stopped speaking, so she did not finish her sentence of “then there would be no more happiness to wish for, it would be complete.” She intended to have said this ; but instead she went out through the open window, and met her father on the lawn. He dismounted from his horse, held her in his arms, and kissed her calm face.

“My own looks herself to-night,” he said, “bright little gem!” the Squire kissed her again, and looked enquiringly at her—she drew her arm through his, and said :

“Are you tired papa?”

“No, Lucy bird, do you want to take a turn?”

“Yes, dear papa ! but wait for Maude.” Maude came, and wrapping her sister in a shawl, held Lucy’s hand in her’s, as they walked linked together up and down the path between the shrubberies. The day had been intensely hot, and the evening was calm

and still ; the flowers bent down by the heat, revived at the moistening of the crystal dew.

“Papa dearest !” Lucy said, “you have loved me very much, and cared for me very much. But I must leave you.”

“Lucy, my child !” the Squire exclaimed in anxious tones of enquiry.

“Yes, papa, I have heard to-day of Robert, and I must go to him—you will be glad when we are together again—will you not, dear papa ?”

“I don’t understand it all,” the Squire said, looking appealingly at Maude.

Maude had the Countess’s letter in her hand, and she read aloud the paragraph concerning Robert.

“Ah ! I thought so—I told him so years ago !” the Squire exclaimed ; “and my poor little woman—what would you do in a land of papists ?”

“They would not hurt me,” Lucy said with a staid smile.

“Let me write to him, and, perhaps, then the young gentleman will think better of him-

self and come back—Erresford has left the living open.”

“Mr. Erresford has been so good. Robert will feel grateful, I know; but we must not write. No, dear papa, I have quite made up my mind to go to him.”

“When are we to start then, little woman?” the Squire said.

“Oh, dear papa, I am going quite alone,” Lucy replied. “I have explained it all to Maude, and she understands how it must be.”

“Queen Maude does not know anything about it, if she fancies I should ever let my Lucy bird stretch her little wings abroad, without the old swallow by her side.”

“You do not know, papa, how well I can take care of myself; and Robert will think I have much more trust in him, if I go to him alone.”

“And what will you do when you get there?” the Squire asked—wondering at the courage and gentle determination of the small, fair creature by his side.

“I shall find out Robert’s lodgings and go

to him ; and I intend to take Harry and a servant, papa, so I shall do very well. Every week I can write to you and Maude ; and then, when Robert has quite forgiven my taking him by storm, you could join us—and, perhaps, we could all come home together.”

The Squire was quite affected with Lucy’s quiet hopeful plans. He frowned and winced and waged war with a tear, which, however, gained the day, and dropped down his sun-burnt cheek. Lucy was gazing at the evening star shining out in its beauty. The Squire too looked up.

“ You will not find this quietude in foreign countries, Lucy bird ! ” he said.

“ There is peace everywhere, dear papa—even in crowded thoroughfares, for trusting hearts.”

“ Ah ! my own gem. I hope peace will come to you at last.”

“ I am sure of it, dear papa,” Lucy replied ; “ if I could only reach dear Robert, to pass the anniversary of our wedding-day together. We have never been apart yet on that day.”

“ That allows you little time for journeying, Lucy darling,” Maude said.

“I ought to do it in a week, Maude. You and papa might take me to Paris—that would be seeing me part of my way.”

“That is a bright idea, little woman!” said the Squire. “Maude and I have never seen foreign parts yet.”

Lucy added, in a winning tone :

“You will think me very pressing—but could we not be in London to-morrow night?”

“That is short breathing time ; but it shall be as you please,” replied her father, thinking it best to let Lucy have her own way.

They walked up and down amid the shady trees and shrubberies, till a starry host filled the sky, and the sounds and lights in the village died away. Lucy spoke most. The Squire and Maude felt a dreariness at the thought of their Lucy leaving her home again ; and for what ? They knew not. Her husband might welcome her with love ; but he might plunge her in yet deeper sorrow. The moon rose, and Lucy feeling weary, the Squire and his daughters went in again under the roof of the Manor House—and the doors were closed, and shut out the night. Lucy wrote that

evening in her journal the text, "God is love." Her heart was filled with gratitude and praise, and yet sorrow must still cling around her, and the light shall not dawn yet ! The moon lingered that night around the sleeping forms of Lucy and her little child ; it had shone on her many a night as she slept.

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An almanack pasted to the wall of a scantily furnished room in Rome, gave information that August's days were nearly over. Every day as it passed away had had a black mark through it, but against that day, the 29th of the month, there was a red cross placed, and not a cross only, but a line all round the figures, hedging them in and keeping them separate from the rest. A corner of the almanack had become loosened from the wall, and the breeze coming in at an open window, flapped it up and down with a rustling sound. The same breeze that perpetrated this little disturbance, also blew against the shoulders of a young man who stooped over a table with a cup of coffee by his side, and several books spread open before him.

Apparently the familiarity of the frolicsome zephyr was displeasing to him, for he shrugged first one shoulder, then the other; and finally pushing back his chair, he rose to shut out the intruder. The window was many stories up in a high house, and looked directly into the corresponding window of another tall house. And did the young student direct his eyes downward, they lighted on a dirty street with no footpath, where the sun seldom shone on the sable priests, veiled nuns, vegetable-carriers, water-carriers, *vetturinos* and others who passed and repassed. There were no attractions for pausing to look above the faded blinds; and the young man, when he had closed out the summer breeze, turned away again to his table; and in turning, his eyes encountered the almanack on the wall.

There was a Madonna, the Crucifixion, a head of St. Ambrose, a likeness of the Pope; but none rivetted those languid blue eyes, like the English almanack. For ten minutes they never wandered from it, though during so short a period transition took place which exchanged the expression of that pallid coun-



tenance from apathy to self-accusation and shame.

He stole back to his chair, drew from his pocket a leather case filled with papers, and from among them he selected one with careful handling, from whence came two locks of hair folded in a piece of old ribbon. The one exceeding fair, the other like a skein of unspun silk in texture; and in colour it might have overshadowed an angel's brow in its soft golden shade. The young man raised these to his lips; then throwing his arms before him, pressed his forehead on the table and groaned aloud. Ah! well does he recall the hour when that faded ribbon was preserved in remembrance of his happiness!

A stealthy footfall ascended the many stairs, as silent, as cautious as a spy on secret mission bound; it halted on the highest landing; then, in the young man's room stood a dark and aged figure.

A deadly pallor overspread the student's countenance. He raised his head, and sat trembling and cowering like a culprit.

The old man addressed hot and angry words to him; spoke of "duty, weakness, and

retrograding." The other in return pleaded "natural affection." The eyes of the old man grow bright with anger, and the effeminate countenance of his companion is suffused with resentment. But a little while, and this all passed away.

The student knelt low, and kissed the old man's hand with the same lips that had pressed those two fair locks. And when the old man had laid his hand forgivingly on the suppliant head, together they passed from that prison-like room, down the one hundred and seventy steep stone steps, and so out into the dismal street; and from thence the Padre Anastasio, and the divinity student Aylmer soon vanished amid the thoroughfares of Rome.

There was a long day of toil and study, fastings and penance, for the perverted Aylmer, and there was not an hour of that day that did not bring before him the faces of his wife and little child, as he saw them last on the snowy morning when his Lucy with her Harry in her arms watched him away, while he turned from her to the gloomy brotherhood. He seemed to hear

his own voice repeating over again the vow made three years ago on that very day ; and the words, “ to love, honour and cherish, till death us do part ” rang like a knell on his guilty ear.

Jaded, cast down, his mind enslaved, his very thoughts subservient to the iron rule of the priesthood, Robert Aylmer walked the streets with eyelids bent and drooping step towards his own home. ‘ Home,’ was a strange word as associated with those two gloomy rooms. Surely that church must have great and wonderful fascinations which could have induced him to quit his own happy English nook !

He crossed himself and repeated prayers against unholy thoughts, as slowly he mounted one by one the steep flight leading to his abode of solitude, and sometimes of despair. On reaching the topmost step, a child’s voice fell on his ear. He paused and listened, it was an unusual sound on his floor, though one or two children lived lower down.

When he had waited and listened two or three minutes, he became convinced that the

sound proceeded from his own rooms. All the mild Robert's anger was called forth at intruders in his apartments, the outer door of which he had forgotten to lock on leaving. Softly Robert approached, intending to take the offenders by surprise, and rather trembling for the safety of the valuable books lent by the Padre Anastasio.

Robert was not yet practised in the art of applying his ear to key-holes, together with divers other lawful little ways and means of discovering secrets ; so, directly his caution had brought him quietly to his door, he opened it and went in, picturing to himself the surprise of the inmates. But surprise awaited himself—startling, strange, magical. He stood rooted to the doorway, and well-nigh thought his senses gone, or that he were in the world of spirits. A sweet breeze ran through his usually close, hot room ; the curtains were looped aside, and a flood of unusual light came in. Had a fairy arranged his books ? Had a fairy placed on the table an English tea ? Had a fairy adjusted furniture, removed dust, placed sweet-scented flowers on the empty stove ? Had a fairy

transplanted numberless little comforts from his old vicarage home among the Somerset hills?

The curtain drew back which divided his rooms. Oh! was she dead, and this her spirit—or did the living Lucy stand before him, arrayed in her pale summer dress, and adorned with the light of her shining hair, and in her arms that fair child, who buries his face on her shoulder? Oh! Robert could have fallen to the ground—but his wife's arms are around him; and the misguided, erring man forgot months of sorrow, remorse, battles against will, affections, and wept like a child!

Patient, enduring one! thou hast found thy way to his heart at last! Keep fast thy hold, sweet one! for Rome is ready to fight with thee—even for thy husband's love!

## CHAPTER IV.

So dear I love him, that with him all deaths  
I could endure, without him live no life.

MILTON.

What will not woman, gentle woman, dare,  
When strong affection stirs her spirit up ?

SOUTHEY.

THEY sat side by side in the twilight, her head resting on his shoulder—his arm twined around her ; and the gentle voice he had so loved in days now mingled with the past, spoke to him once again, and told him in whispered tones of their little one in Heaven. No word of upbraiding, no questioning or rebuke, had passed those meek lips ; love she brought with her, and peace ! These suffused

her very atmosphere like a fragrance from above ; and the wear and tear of life, with its sorrows and its sins, seemed forgotten.

The present brought such a placid, soothing feeling with it, that Robert scarce dared think or breathe, lest it should vanish again, and leave before him only the sternness of the inexorable past. He felt as if under the influence of a dream. Was it possible, that he, who only a few short hours ago had been toiling among books of Catholic lore, trying to forget the existence of every earthly tie, and centre his heart, his hopes, on the cold, stern Romish priesthood—should now be listening to his wife's voice, watching her every look, as if his life hung on her smile ? He sat contemplating her for a long time ; then, in a quick, anxious voice, he said :

“ Lucy, are you well ? ”

“ Yes, Robert dearest. You do not think me altered ? ” she asked, raising her head.

“ It may be fancy, my own Lucy, yet I see a change. ”

He looked so sadly grave, that Lucy

laughed as she had not done for a long long time.

“Robert, dear, I cannot allow that sad look. You forget I have had a long journey, and doubtless that gives me a weary appearance.”

“A long journey in quest of one altogether unworthy!” he said in a stifled voice.

“Come, Robert, I will not have you undervalue yourself!” Lucy exclaimed, in a sweet tone of playfulness.

“Oh! Lucy, the past—the past!” Robert broke forth, in a sort of smothered groan.

“Robert, dearest, I know you do not wish to grieve me,” Lucy said; “but you could not do it more, than by reverting to what has gone by. The past is over, my own dear—we have nothing to do with that now; the present is joy enough—and the future is ours. It remains for us to make it joyful.”

Robert stooped over her, and as he kissed her brow, he whispered :

“Only tell me you forgive !”



“Yes, darling, if you can forgive me coming and taking you by storm?”

“Eight days’ journey,” he murmured, “with no companion but a servant!”

“And our boy! Robert, you must not forget him. And then you do not remember that my father and Maude accompanied me as far as Paris. Dear papa, everything was so strange to him!”

“How could he part from you, my own?”

“Papa has Maude—you had no one,” she whispered. “Dear papa was never selfish.”

“Oh! that I could say the same myself!” interrupted Robert. “And would your father trust you?”

“He left everything to me,” she replied; “and I had such a famous escort. There is nothing like a travelled servant; and Stevens, Lady Flora’s former maid, turned up so opportunely. I never knew I had made such an impression upon her, till she pressed her services, with an assurance that she would go to *Botany Bay* with me!”

Lucy spoke brightly and cheerfully. Evening shadows gathered on, and Robert could only see the outline of her face in the darkness.

"This is a gloomy place, Lucy, and so many stairs to mount. I must find you a better home," Robert said.

"What is convenient for you, is good enough for me, dear," she replied, "though all these stairs must try you sadly."

"I am accustomed to them," he said; "but you will pine away, after the fresh air of home."

In a low voice, Lucy added:

"Why not return there, Robert?"

"I dare not, Lucy; my destiny is cast elsewhere."

She asked no explanation; but his words sent a feeling of desolation to her heart. She tried to shake it off, and realize that wherever Robert was, there was home.

"Did you see Lady De Walden, Lucy?" Robert asked.

"No. Stevens went for your address, and I waited with Harry at an hotel. I expected

to have been here much earlier, but the Countess had to send to the Marchesa Elmo, and she again to her brother."

"Not Padre Anastasio?" Robert exclaimed in a startled tone.

"Yes! that was the name. But he did not know it was for me. The message went in Lady De Walden's name."

"Lucy," Robert said, in a voice that terrified her, "Padre Anastasio thinks I am separated from you. I am studying with him for the priesthood of the Holy Catholic Church!"

It was quite dark now, so Robert could not see Lucy's face; but he fancied she panted for breath, and he began to be alarmed at her silence, when she said, in a voice of forced composure:

"That accounts for the astonishment of the porter when I arrived this afternoon; but when I showed him my card, and he saw the name on the luggage, he allowed me to go up."

"He never told me any one was in my rooms, Lucy."

“I wanted to surprise you, dearest Robert, on the anniversary of our wedding-day.”

Robert sighed. Priestly anger was coming over him, and infusing terror into his heart. His wife's heretic faith also stared him in the face. He was bewildered and puzzled; and in the changeableness of his nature, he almost wished Lucy had not found out his retreat. He sat and pondered in silence over Padre Anastasio's probable anger, and his being compelled to abandon the idea of entering the priesthood, till Stevens, for whom and the little Harry Lucy had already engaged another room, came in with a light. It fell across the calm, sleeping face on his shoulder; and it showed unmistakeable traces of change. The dimpled freshness upon those soft cheeks, the expression of perfect repose, these were there no longer. There was a look of weariness and exhaustion, of settled endurance and care, that pained him to the very heart; and the wavering, weak-minded young man forgot church, priests—all, in the returning remorse and anguish at what he had caused. It was he who had rendered her young life sad ;

he who had blighted her hopes, and crushed her health ! She woke up suddenly, and saw his eyes fixed anxiously upon her.

“ I shall look brighter to-morrow, Robert, indeed I shall,” she said, as she rose up to arrange the lamp which was burning dimly. Robert watched her cross the room. Her step was feeble—he thought her childish elasticity was gone ; and yet she looked so young, so small and helpless that his pity and remorse were increased. His best feelings would have prompted him at once to take her back to her English home. His religion said, “ remain here !” and it triumphed.

It was past eight o’clock the next morning. Robert had gone out in quest of new rooms. Those he occupied at present he had agreed were too shut in, too high for his wife and little boy fresh from their free Somerset hills. Lucy was employing herself, arranging Robert’s long neglected wardrobe. The little Harry played on the floor with a few toys. Stevens, who was well acquainted with Rome, from frequent visits in the Countess’s suite,

had gone forth to make purchases for the day.

Lucy, bending over her work, and occasionally kneeling down to amuse her little boy, was startled by a knock at the door, which was opened without waiting for permission; and rather to her alarm, an elderly priest stood in the entrance. She instantly rose, and, bowing, asked, in very good Italian, if the Padre were seeking any one.

The old man replied in English, that he was seeking Mr. Aylmer; and he looked intently at her from beneath his bushy eyebrows as he spoke.

“My husband has gone out,” she replied, with an outward composure she was far from feeling.

The priest stared and muttered something to himself in Latin. Lucy asked if he would leave any message. He replied, “none,” and fixed his eyes on little Harry, who, ceasing his play, looked wistfully and timidly at the stranger.

“You came last night, I believe?” Padre Anastasio said, addressing Lucy.

“I arrived in Rome yesterday,” she replied, with quiet dignity.

“And how long do you intend to remain?” he farther enquired.

“As long as my husband does,” Lucy answered.

“You are acquainted with Lady Anne Erresford?” he asked.

“Her sister is my aunt,” Lucy replied, wondering why he enquired.

“You cannot remain up at the top of this house, in a student’s lodgings,” said the Padre. “Your husband is preparing for the holy office. If you remain at Rome, it must be as boarder in a convent.”

She looked imploringly up at the stern old man, as she said, in gentle tones :

“My husband and I will never separate again.”

The priest replied in a harsh voice :

“You are obstinate, Signora.”

“Not obstinate, but firm, Padre,” she said :

“Another word for the same thing,” he observed with a sarcastic smile.

“The words express a very different meaning to me,” Lucy quietly remarked.

The priest glared at her a moment, then said :

“ You cannot love your husband very much ; for by coming here you blight all his prospects.”

“ Do you think so, Padre ?” she said in her sweet, soft voice.

“ Do I think so ? Do I know it, you mean ? I can tell you something, Signora,” he continued. “ Since Robert Aylmer’s residence here, the church has provided for him. But, Signora, our church does not support heretics like yourself, unless it is in a convent.”

“ Padre,” she said, gravely. “ I did not come here to claim the help of your church.”

“ Then you will be compelled to starve,” he exclaimed, “ for your husband is penniless.”

“ Padre,” she said, “ I do not feel myself called upon to discuss either my own or my husband’s affairs with a stranger.”

“ As soon as you knew them yourself, I knew them, Signora,” he replied. “ Nothing is



secret from me : I am your husband's confessor," he cast on her a look of triumph.

"Then, Padre, if you know all, why ask me any questions ?" she sighed deeply.

The old man turned away.

"I go to seek your husband," he said.

Lucy trembled, a faintness came over her, and she leant against the window-sill. Padre Anastasio turned once again, and as he caught sight of her meek, fair face, he murmured,

"She will easily be terrified into doing as we wish !" He knew not the resolute, brave soul within that frail frame !

Eagerly and anxiously Lucy awaited her husband's return, but it was not till night-fall Robert came back. He looked harassed, and cast down, and instead of an affectionate greeting to Lucy, he threw himself on a chair, and rested his head on his outspread arms. There was just the least possible shade of alarm on Lucy's face, mingled with a great deal of love and compassion. She gently approached Robert, and put her arm over his shoulder.

"You have wearied yourself, dear Robert,"

she said ; “ let us remain here, if other rooms are difficult to find.”

“ We cannot remain here, Lucy,” he replied, raising his head with a sudden jerk that displaced his arm ; “ how can I live, I, a penniless man, supported at the expense of the Church ?”

“ Robert ! I shall be no additional expense to you,” Lucy said in a very low tone, “ there is still Sir Edgar’s legacy untouched, and next May I come of age, and take possession of my mother’s little property. I will not be any burden on you, dearest.”

“ But what am I to do ?” Robert asked, in a fretful tone. “ I am fit for no employment, but that of the priesthood.”

Lucy stood still with her hands crossed, her old childish attitude. Robert did not look towards her, or surely his heart would have melted. There was entire silence in that great room for some minutes, and then Lucy said meekly :

“ There is enough to support us all, dear Robert, or if you wish for more I can work. I dare say I could give English lessons.”

"That is all folly," Robert replied, throwing his face forward, and covering it with his hands.

Lucy perfectly shook with agitation, and bitter tears overflowed those soft eyes.

"Robert, dear," she said, submissively, "only tell me what you would have me do?"

"Return to your father, Lucy," he replied; "would to Heaven I had never taken you from your home! Oh, Lucy, I am a wretched, distracted creature. Do not add to my misery!"

"I would not for worlds, dear Robert," she said.

"But while you are with me, you do," he almost groaned. "Lucy, it has been shown me clearly, that the priesthood is my vocation, and I dare not shrink from it. There is only one obstacle in the way—it is yourself—Lucy. We must part, and I be to you as dead—forgotten—as though we had never met."

Lucy closed her eyes, and covered them with her hand, as if to shut out some vision too dreadful for sight.

Robert went on in the same unnatural, stifled tone.

“Feel for me, Lucy, feel for my soul, and do not make me sacrifice eternity for a short space of earthly love !”

“These are not your own words, Robert, my husband,” Lucy said, as she knelt down, and rested her clasped hands on his knee. “Your heart, unprompted, would never speak thus ; Robert, you recollect your promise three years ago. Oh, do not break it now

“Ah, Lucy !” he said, “on that day you promised to obey me—the obedience I ask is not difficult. You will be happier far with your father than with me—our creeds differ widely ; and our paths are separate. Lucy, again I ask you, tempt me not to sacrifice eternity ”

Her voice nearly died away as she said :

“Robert, dear, I shall love you till death. Nothing but that can tear me from you !” she pulled away one of his hands from his face, and covered it with her kisses and her tears.

“Oh, Lucy, Lucy !” he exclaimed bitterly, “must I yield ! If the Church—if my faith

did not demand it otherwise of me ! but every holy feeling in my soul bids me press on—do not break my heart !”

“ Robert,” Lucy said in a calm voice, “ think of Harry ! oh, dear husband ! you loved him so much once !”

“ Lucy, if we part, he shall be yours—to love you, to care for you, to be brought up in your faith. If you remain, the Church demands it of me, that, as soon as he arrives at years of discernment, she receives him from me into her pale.”

“ When every earthly hope fails me,” she said, in a scarcely audible voice, “ I must turn to Heaven and look there !” she rose and moved away, but a sudden impulse compelled her to turn back, and stooping down she whispered, “ The first sermon you ever preached at Forsted, was from the words “ Look up !” Robert dear ! “ the remembrance of you from the past shall be my comfort !” she stood a moment by his side, then seeing he did not notice her, she went away, and knelt in mute and tearless agony by the couch of her sleeping child ; then she remembered what Cecil had said when he brought her the

news of her husband's flight from St. Margaret's. "It is very stormy now—but peace cannot be far off."

"Peace—peace!" Lucy murmured, "there will be peace in Heaven!"

While Lucy knelt in silence and in darkness, the Padre Anastasio conversed with the Lady Anne in one of the Marchesa Elmo's saloons.

"My mind is quite made up," her Ladyship said, in her wonted proud tones. "I purpose next week making a public profession of my faith, and Holy Father, I crave your blessing on the occasion."

The Padre bowed in silent acquiescence.

"You look *triste*, to-night, Padre," Lady Anne remarked.

"My soul is quite bowed down," the priest replied, "with grief for one of my dearest converts."

"You speak of Mr. Aylmer," Lady Anne remarked, "my mother tells me, his wife has joined him."

"May she be added to the only true fold," ejaculated the Father piously.

"Even your persuasions will fail there,"

Lady Anne continued. "In spite of that childlike meekness of manner, there is a deep-rooted firmness of character, which nothing will eradicate."

"You know her well," Padre Anastasio remarked, carelessly handling a bronze within his reach.

"I knew them both before they married, and did my utmost to prevent it—that was the wrong act of Mr. Aylmer's life."

"I understood from you, Signora, there had been a formal separation," the Padre said in bland tones.

"Mr. Mostyn of St. Margaret's was my informant," Lady Anne replied.

The Padre looked thoughtful a few moments, then he addressed Lady Anne, "Could you not, as a good and faithful daughter of the church, use your influence in the conversion of the young wife of Mr. Aylmer?"

"I rarely fail in anything I undertake, but failure would be certain there," replied her Ladyship, "The best thing any one can do, is to persuade her to return to England."

"And consent to a divorce," added the Padre.

“Another impossibility,” said Lady Anne. “I never saw any one so blindly attracted to her husband as Mrs. Aylmer.”

“Our church removes mountains,” rejoined the Padre, with a courtly smile.

“I wish it success in this case, from my heart, but *je’n doute !*” observed her Ladyship.

“Any influence that Mrs. Aylmer may have with her husband, is but transitory,” said the priest.

“The little creature has great fascination, and knows how to play her part well,” remarked Lady Anne. “It would not astonish me if she drew him back to apostacy ! There has been an extraordinary attachment between them, dating from childhood ; and few men can resist such persuasion and tears as she will pour forth.”

“Signora, do you not speak a little too lightly of his falling back ?” said Padre Anastasio.

“Lightness was not meant,” she said, twirling carelessly a handsome fan. “You do not know how much I have had at heart the welfare of that weak young man. Both Mr.



Mostyn and I were persevering in our arguments and persuasions."

"Twice they have been effectual with the husband. Why should they not be equally so with the wife?"

"Padre, you do not know her. Had she been of a temperament like my sister, it would have been an easy work for her husband to persuade, or alarm her into our views; but my brother Cecil could not be more obstinate than Lucy."

"*Lucie*—ah! that is a meek and gentle name," murmured the priest.

Lady Anne turned her head suddenly round towards the crowd of guests, and close by, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of a fine Correggio, she saw Lord Glendowan. The priest looked that way also, and there was an expression on his countenance, which seemed to say, "I like thee not;" but Lord Glendowan's eyes were fixed intently on the painting. Now he drew near, now moved backwards, then raised his double glasses; by and bye he let these fall and looked around, and his eyes and Padre Anastasio's met.

"I am charmed to meet you, my Lord,"

said the priest. "What report of your lady sister?"

"She left to-day in flourishing health for Scotland," he replied, pushing his hat from off his forehead.

"Milord remains alone?" said the priest, blandly smiling.

"Yes! it suits my pleasure *pour le moment*. The Marchesa has added considerably to her collection of paintings, Monsieur."

"Considerably," said the priest. "Are there any new arrivals to-day of English travellers, Milord?"

"None of note, I believe."

"Nor yesterday; no acquaintances of your own?"

"One meets with acquaintances everywhere—they turn up by some means," replied Lord Glendowan.

The priest bit his under lip and scowled; then turning to Lady Anne, who was silently regarding the many groups, he said, with a courtly inclination, "I must seek the noble Countess, and offer her my congratulations on her son-in-law's accession to rank."

Lord Glendowan's attention was instantly fixed.

"Lady Sangford is a proud wife," continued the priest, "for talent, my dear lady, is power and strength."

Lord Glendowan fixed his eyes again on the Correggio, and a mournful expression pervaded his countenance.

"Lord Sangford is an honour to his profession," said Lady Anne "Our family is completely reconciled now."

"Ah! your sister was a little hardly used," said the padre: "it was but the hastiness of youth."

Lord Glendowan still gazed at his painting and sighed; the priest and Lady Anne moved away. Shortly after, Robert Aylmer mingled with the crowd of guests.

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It was early in September, and at an exquisite villa some twenty miles from London among the hills of Surrey, a large party were assembled at dinner.

Maude Neville and Cecil Erresford sat

side by side. The Squire was there, his sister, Lord De Walden and sundry grand cousins of that noble house, and last, though not least among the guests, were the noble Countess De Walden and the Lady Anne.

The table and sideboard groaned beneath the weight of plate, matchless in design and beauty; the choicest exotics filled the centre; the rarest fruits graced the desert; at each corner rose and fell a fountain of fragrant perfumes; musicians stationed in the hall, played at intervals well-chosen airs.

Pleasant feelings pervaded the elegant assembly. The Countess's feathers waved gracefully, Lady Anne's voice sounded cheerfully. By and bye, an Earl cousin, with a lisp and a bad address, rose and made a speech, when all eyes were directed towards the noble host and hostess; and the noble hostess in her splendid lace and brilliants, smiled as she had rarely smiled before, and Lord Sangford rose and made a speech in her name and his, in which he expressed his delight at the family reconciliation. Then Flora moved; and lace, feathers, velvets, and brilliants,

sailed forth to the matchless drawing-room, and lounged on couches of white and rose satin, and toyed with feather screens—while the congratulations of the gentlemen were again tendered to Archer Tyrrell—Lord Sangford !

## CHAPTER V.

There is a comfort in the strength of love,  
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else  
Would overset the brain, or break the heart.

WORDSWORTH.

THE wife whom Robert had chosen as the sharer of his home, his happiness, and his love—the wife, who before he had won her, seemed to his heart's imagination, the sweetest jewel upon earth—and during the time they passed together, proved herself as angelic, as loving, as devoted, as his brightest dream had e'er conceived—this wife, so unselfish, so gentle, was now the greatest burden—the one care of Robert Aylmer's life. He wished to enter the Romish priesthood. It was to this

end he had left Ackington, that dreary winter night. But his Lucy, his "pale violet," as Archer had once called her, was the barrier, the one obstacle, that shut him firmly out from enrolling himself among the dark-browed, dark-clad throng, who crowd the cathedrals and churches of the Eternal City.

The Padre Anastasio and his brethren no longer supported their victim, at the church's expense; he had left his student's lodgings, and resided in a small house, whose upper windows took in a glimpse of the distant Campagna. All the lower part was unlet, and belonged to an ancient man called Pietro, who used to smile on Lucy as she passed in and out, speaking pleasant, sweet words, and making her little Harry kiss his tiny hand to the old man.

Her boy was her only earthly pleasure now, for the little wife lived a strange, solitary life; almost the whole of the day her husband was absent from her; he either left voluntarily, or Padre Anastasio fetched him away, after a few grimly uttered words to the frightened Lucy, on her obstinacy in depriving her husband of the inestimable privileges a

membership with the priesthood would have gained him !

Two months had elapsed since Lucy Aylmer first joined her husband in Rome, two long, weary months, during which, Robert had seemed to her each day to grow more strange. At times, a little of his fond manner returned ; then again, he was so cold, so shrinking and silent, that he appeared under some vow of increased austerity. Lucy had not one single friend with whom she could hold intimate converse. The Countess and Lady Anne, had long since left Rome ; new friends, in her strange position, she dared not make, nor did she trust herself to write more letters than absolutely necessary to her home relations. She had little to tell, and dreaded to excite their fears for her happiness, and so be the cause of bringing to her either her father or her sister, who, she was sure would instantly take her back to England. Poor forlorn, lone one ! their love and sympathy would have been more sweet to her than words could express ; but self was not mingled with her daily life, except in so far as it could be made subservient to the one object



for which she came, for which she endured and suffered ; the winning back her husband to her love, from the miserable asceticism in which he now lived. One thing carried Lucy along her otherwise almost unbearable way, and that was, the hope of final victory over Father Anastasio and his influence. She looked to Heaven for aid, and surely she would not look in vain. But daily her road grew darker, her hope less distinct. During the last few days the priest had been pressing Lucy to consent to a separation, without which her husband could not enter the priesthood. Not one word of anger had the priest drawn forth from her meek lips—all his persuasions were in vain, and made no impression on the gentle, but courageous girl.

Lucy sat one afternoon at the high window—her work in her hand—her child playing on the floor, at her feet. Her needle plied diligently, and she only now and then raised her eyes to look across the distant landscape, and up at the dear blue canopy of heaven, with which her thoughts seemed communing. She was so intent, so preoccupied, that she did not hear a low knock, and was rather startled,

when on raising her eyes, the door opened, and the Lady Anne Erresford, accompanied by her attendant Agnese, entered the room. Lucy rose instantly, and a pink flush suffused her delicate countenance. What a vision of bygone days ! Her lady visitor called to her mind visions of her country home as it had been formerly—the remembrance of her first meeting with the Lady Anne, rose speedily to her view.

“Mrs. Aylmer, I hope I am not intruding on you,” were her Ladyship’s first words.

“Oh no ! it is kind of you to come to me,” Lucy replied, as she invited Lady Anne to her own vacant chair. “Agnese, I hope you are well, pray be seated.”

Agnese in the humblest manner seated herself close to the door, and tried to make friends with little Harry ; who, however, rejected all her offers of friendship, and posting himself beneath a table, peered at her from behind the table-cloth.

“Have you been long in Rome, Lady Anne?” Lucy asked, as they sat confronting each other by the window.

“ Oh no ! I only arrived yesterday morning. I winter here,” she added, eyeing Lucy with a strange, frigid stare.

“ Have you travelled alone ?” Lucy enquired.

“ Simply with Agnese for my companion. I am staying as guest with the Marchesa Elmo—charming, delightful woman, is she not ?”

“ I only know her by name,” Lucy timidly replied.

“ Strange—but how is that ? Your husband visits intimately there. I met him last night at the Palazzo.”

Lucy’s eyes fell, and her cheek reddened beneath Lady Anne’s gaze. She could have told how she knew nothing of her husband’s movements ; but this meek wife never complained, so she only asked if Lady Anne thought Robert looking well ?

“ Not very blooming,” was the reply, “ he appears harassed ; but you, Mrs. Aylmer, you are terribly altered !”

“ Am I ?” Lucy said with a smile at Lady Anne’s earnest manner.

“ My dear creature, do you never look in the glass ? This city does not suit

you, I see plainly. You should return to Forsted."

"It is not convenient at present," Lucy said quietly.

"You cannot possibly have anything to detain you here," urged her Ladyship.

"It suits my husband to remain," Lucy gently answered.

"That surely is no reason why you should waste your health in a place which does not agree with you?"

"My husband's home must be mine," was Lucy's calm reply.

"That is a folly! pardon me the expression," said Lady Anne, her manner becoming more dictatorial. "A husband cannot always be tied to his wife."

"No!" replied Lucy in a strangely thrilling tone, "death can part them!"

"Tush! you must entertain no such dismal thought. You, a little flower made to dance along through life, are not fit to dwell in this gloomy house, with a husband wrapped up in himself—depend upon it, Mrs. Aylmer, you are best separated. Nothing in this world

will ever make your husband cheerful or happy, but the life he has chosen, the priesthood. Why stand in his way? You have a happy English home to which to go, a kind father, an affectionate sister to receive you—and clearly to me with them your life ought to be spent. Your troubles will soon pass away, and the happy Forsted girl return again.”

With a calm dignity of manner of which Lady Anne never thought her capable, Lucy said :

“ Padre Anastasio has broached this subject before. It is not a pleasant one, and I think in friendly conversation, we should do well to avoid it.”

“ As you please,” Lady Anne replied, “ but believe me, child, the Padre and myself have your soul’s welfare at heart. You injure your husband sadly.”

Lucy’s colour alternated rapidly from red to white, and a peculiarly distressed expression played around her mouth; it hovered there a moment, then changed into a soft, sweet smile, as she addressed Lady Anne

with inquiries after her friends in England.

"They are all in health, I believe," Lady Anne replied, for the first time turning her cold, dark eyes on little Harry, who still continued his inquiring gaze at his mother's new visitors. "I think your child must feel the change," she added.

"Not at all," Lucy replied; "it is a comfort to me to see him so blooming."

Just at this juncture, little Harry, not liking the look of Lady Anne's large eyes, pulled a corner of the table-cloth down before him, to conceal himself from her view, in which achievement he succeeded in upsetting an ink-stand on the floor. This disturbed the conversation, and Lady Anne took herself and her attendant away, saying, as she left the room, in patronizing tones :

"I shall very often come to see you, Mrs. Aylmer."

Poor Lucy ! As she assisted Stevens in removing the ink-spots from the floor, she

sighed, and thought that Lady Anne always seemed to fall as a blight upon her!

Lucy waited for tea some time that evening before Robert returned; and when he did come in, he was silent and moody. Lucy wheeled a chair for him to the table.

"You look very tired, Robert, dear," she said, casting on him an anxious glance.

"I am," he replied, throwing his head back. "I am very weary and wretched."

"Hush, Robert, darling! there is nothing to make you wretched," Lucy said.

"So you think," he replied, impatiently; "but it is enough to make me wretched to see you and Harry cooped up here, out of the way of every friend or comfort, and to know that I can do nothing for you."

"Dear Robert! do not make yourself unhappy about us. I am sure Harry and I are very bonnie; and as to friends, one has turned up only this afternoon."

"Lady Anne Erresford ! But you do not like her ?"

"She is rather stiff ; but I suppose she cannot help that. And, you know, we ought to overlook faults in our connections. I dare say I appear as strange to her as she does to me."

"What did she talk about ?" Robert asked.

"Principally generalities," Lucy replied. "She had Agnese with her, and she was rather a restraint."

"Agnese is an excellent young woman," Robert remarked, as Lucy handed him his tea, and some cake she had been making from an English receipt.

"She seems much attached to Lady Anne," Lucy replied. The little wife never argued with her husband.

"You have been wearying yourself to death this morning by cooking, I know, Lucy ?" Robert said, looking up.

"So far from it fatiguing me, dear, I enjoyed it," Lucy replied.

"That Stevens is so helpless !" Robert



said. "You want some bustling, practical person who could give you more assistance. The Marchesa told me of one or two such yesterday evening."

"Oh! Robert dear, I would so much rather not part with Stevens!" Lucy exclaimed, in a little alarm.

"Our boy will never learn Italian with her," Robert remarked; "with a native he would acquire it easily."

"I will teach him words," Lucy said, smiling. "Do not fear, Robert, there is plenty of time yet to make our baby-boy a linguist."

"Poor child!" sighed Robert.

Lucy closed her eyes, and was silent for a moment. Was she lifting up one of her frequent prayers to Heaven?

Robert finished his tea in thoughtful abstraction; and not all Lucy's efforts could draw him into conversation. When the table was cleared, he took from a desk pens and paper, and commenced casting up a long column of accounts. Lucy worked diligently, and the clicking of her needle was the only sound in that dull room. Presently Robert

laid his pen down, with the exclamation :

“Padre Anastasio was right. I have calculated over and over again, and with every economy we cannot live here under three hundred a year—he told me so; and yet with that there is not one comfort to be procured for you.”

“Men do not know anything about house-keeping,” Lucy said, in a cheerful tone. “I wish you would not trouble your head at all about such things, dear old husband! We shall not starve so long as Sir Edgar’s legacy lasts, and if we are not more extravagant than at present, it will carry us on for many a long year; and after my next birthday, there will be one whole hundred a year to add to it! Dear Robert! do throw away those papers, we really are quite rich!” Lucy had come round, and knelt on the floor by Robert; her hand resting on his arm. He turned his head and rested his gaze on her a moment, then leaning his head on the table, he burst into an agony of tears. Lucy’s face became strangely pale, and a tremulous motion played around her lips; but she used great command

over herself, and rising, she said playfully, "Now, Robert, I call this very naughty—I really do. Little Harry could not be worse. Come, Robert, rouse yourself, and I will play at chess with you, or sing to you—only do not be dull, it is so bad for your health: nothing wears people so much as tears—you used to be so bonnie, Robert dear!"

He encircled one arm around her, and rested his head on her shoulder.

"Oh! Lucy, Lucy!" he groaned. "What am I to do—only tell me what I am to do? I love you dearly, dearly. But, oh Lucy! my soul claims my first care, my first solicitude; and these good sons of the church tell me daily that I am sacrificing my soul to you—that I must either renounce my religion, or renounce you! When I arrived in this place, I made a vow to enter the priesthood. I am breaking the vow, Lucy—as you love me, tell me what I am to do?"

"Stay with me, Robert, and never ask me to leave you!" Lucy replied in an earnest tone, in which alarm was mingled.

"When the church commands me other-

wise? Oh, Lucy, if you would only leave your heretic faith?" he said persuasively.

"Dear Robert, the church in which I was baptised, is the church in which I should wish to die!" she replied, in a low soft tone.

"So I thought once," he exclaimed; "but a great change has passed over me since those dark days. Lucy, in moral worth you are perfect, but in spiritual goodness you are in error—fearful error! When I think of you, Lucy, I am like a man in despair!"

"Despair not for me, my own husband," she said sweetly. "I have no fear. If death were to come to-morrow, I might tremble at the dark river I should have to pass; but in the thought of a hereafter, I feel perfect peace."

"Lucy, do not speak of dying!" he exclaimed. "Oh, *miserere! miserere!* Would to Heaven I had never taken you from your happy home!"

"I have never once regretted it," she said gently. "No, no, dear, so far from that, I thank God daily for having given me to you."

He looked a long wistful look at her calm spiritual countenance ; then he said :

“ Oh, Lucy, I thought you would have upbraided me ! ”

“ That would not be wife-like or dutiful on my part,” Lucy said playfully. “ Now Robert, we will not talk any more so lugubriously—what can I do to amuse you ? ”

Robert started up. An old French time-piece on a bracket opposite him played a merry galloping little tune, then in shrill tones it struck nine.

“ I ought to have been there now,” he said, “ Padre Anastasio expects Mostyn. I promised to meet him. Lucy, I must leave you again.”

“ Come back quickly,” she softly murmured, then added, I did not know Mr. Mostyn was in Rome.”

“ He has come to enter the priesthood, blessed man ! he has renounced all to follow his master ! ”

Lucy trembled.

“ Do you not dress, Robert ? ” she asked.

“ It is no assembly,” he replied, “ only

the presence of two saintly ones I go into, and there the world is forgotten—My hat—where is it? I shall be late.” He hastened to find it, while Lucy lighted a candle, and accompanied him down stairs.

“Do not be long, Robert,” she said as they parted.

Pietro opened the outer door, and watched Robert, and then turning to Lucy he said, “*Buona notte, Signora.*” Lucy smiled and wished him good night in her turn; and the old man looked after her as she toiled up the stairs, the flickering light falling over her face sadder, sweeter, more heavenly than it had ever before appeared to his eyes, and he muttered in his kindly old voice, “*Che Dio la mette in Paradiso, che la coronava!*” He asked a sweet boon for her, never thinking how soon it might be granted.

Lucy closed the door of her room after her feebly, and sinking down on a chair, gasped for breath. Stevens who had just before entered to light her mistress’s lamp, held in her arms the pale Lucy panting, struggling as though life and death held warfare. The struggle lasted but a few

moments, then with a heavy sigh, Lucy sat upright and smiled.

"Dear, ma'am, you have been overdone again !" said Stevens anxiously.

"I was foolish not to take any air to-day," Lucy replied in a trembling tone. "I am so thankful your master was not here : it would have distressed him—pray do not mention it, Stevens."

"You are very considerate, ma'am," Stevens replied.

"It is only right, Stevens, to think of the happiness of others. I am sorry I frightened you so much."

"Oh ! never mind me, ma'am. My being a little alarmed is nothing to what you must have felt."

"It was very dreadful while it lasted—it felt like dying. I have heard my mother used to be just so sometimes."

"I wonder what it was ?" Stevens said, "and there is no brandy or anything in the house to give you."

"It is no consequence," Lucy murmured faintly. "I do not think it will return again ; there is some Eau de Cologne in my room,

if you will open one of the windows. I shall be better."

"You will not sit up for master, ma'am?" Stevens asked in alarm.

"Oh yes! I shall try. You know I always do," Lucy replied rising, and walking feebly to the open window.

"I wish we were all back at Forsted, that I do!" Stevens said almost crying as she went to her mistress's room to fetch the Eau de Cologne.

"Oh! how thankful I am," Lucy murmured to herself. "How grateful I ought to be that I did not die. I should like, if it please God, to live for my husband and child—to live a long time for them!"

Oh! was her husband worthy of such a wife? It scarcely seems so, or why did he leave her to-night?

At a table in a large scantily furnished room sat the Padre Anastasio and the holy Hubert the quondam brother of St. Margaret's, Ackington, now carried by an easy transition from the topmost bar of Tractarianism into the fold of the protecting mother, Rome. They were conversing on something important. What



could it be? One of the Padre's remarks was, "there is still an insurmountable obstacle in his way."

"The one great obstacle," replied Mostyn, "in the way of the English priesthood, is marriage—Thank heaven," he added with considerable fervour, "I ever kept from it."

"You have cause to be grateful indeed," muttered the Padre. "Robert is still completely in the dark as regards his future life."

"His wife is immoveable of course," observed Mostyn.

"Oh! obstinate, obstinate as stock or stone!" exclaimed the priest. "Nothing moves her; and, moreover, she still retains influence over her husband."

"Not heretical influence?" Mostyn asked, in alarm.

"Oh, no, not that," exclaimed the Padre, "but a sentimental childish influence, which is very detrimental to his strength of character."

"Cannot you persuade her to return home?" Mostyn enquired.

"I do not know what time may effect, but

as her mind is at present disposed, you might as easily try to remove mountains."

"Will Aylmer come to you to-night, Padre?" said Mostyn.

"He promised, and his word he always keeps. Oh! that we had him once safe within our holy priesthood!"

"If Mrs. Aylmer were only of our faith, we might convince her then of the good accruing to her husband's soul by a separation," remarked Mostyn.

The priest shrugged his shoulders. "Woman's obstinacy, my brother, woman's obstinacy!"

"And yet, Padre, I have known so many convinced. In my own parish of Ackington, two daughters of the leading man there are now within the true fold, while a third is fast following in her excellent sisters' steps. Then two young persons of obscure parentage, farm servants, I believe, have thrown themselves on the protection of the Church, and many others could I mention from the testimony of brother priests. Say you not, Padre, there is hope for England yet?"

"Bright and glorious hope, my son, that

the noble isle will return to her pure and pristine faith! We have fellow workers in well nigh every town and village, working hard and zealously, and with every hope of success. I own there is strong opposition; but is there not also a strong current flowing with and towards us? Oh! blessed be the saints! for England, we can lift high the banner of hope!"

"And so many of the heretical faith are working for us," Hubert said.

"Working boldly for us, and only waiting as you yourself did, to throw off the trammels at the right moment, and come and join us heart and hand. Welcome, thrice welcome! brother!" The Padre held out his hand and grasped that of Mostyn.

At this moment, the door slowly opened, and Robert Aylmer entered.

"Holy father! I am late in keeping my engagement with you. I must plead great bodily fatigue as an excuse—Ha, Mostyn! it rejoices me to meet you once more, and especially here on holy ground."

"We often on the terrace walk at St.

Margaret's talked of this happy time," replied Mostyn.

"When we should both meet as disciples of the one true faith," Robert exclaimed.

"There is a wide difference yet between you, my sons," observed the crafty Anastasio.

A hot colour suffused Robert's face, while Hubert bent his holy eyes meekly on the ground.

"Which is the richest—which the most blessed—which the most worthy the love of our blessed, most pure mother?" the priest began, "he, who, renouncing all earthly ties, gives body, soul and spirit to serve the ancient and only Church; or he, who entrained by the voice of earth, breaks his vow, and turns his back on the work our holy mother wills him to do?"

There was a moment's silence after this harangue, then Robert's voice timidly broke forth.

"Padre! I feel your rebuke deeply, poignantly, the worse from knowing how I merit it. Yet how totally unable am I to place my-

self side by side with my brother in the sacred office."

"There speaks the flesh!" Padre Anastasio broke forth, with a fiery flash in his deep, searching eyes.

"You cannot feel for me, Padre," Robert replied; "you have never experienced like temptations, like sorrows. I took my wife from her home; made her legally mine: I dare not by force cast her off—nothing can be done, but by her free consent."

"Is my son sure he always does his utmost in persuasion and argument with his heretic wife?" said the Padre, in bland but firm tones.

"I dare not torture her with words," Robert said, in a slightly impatient voice.

"You care not for her soul," was the priest's stern rejoinder.

"I do, holy father! believe me, I do!" exclaimed Robert. "Believe me, her soul is dearer to me than my life. Heaven would not be Heaven, did I not meet Lucy there!"

A dark scowl, for a moment, o'erspread the countenance of the ecclesiastic; but Robert

saw it not, his eyes rested in perplexed sadness on the floor.

“Should your wife die an unbeliever, a heretic,” said the priest, “expect you, young man, that Heaven will receive her?”

“Padre, I dare not think of it. The Church tells me, nay, and the knowledge makes my heart bleed.”

“Then, brother, if you so love her, your whole soul’s energies should be given to save her from eternal condemnation,” the holy Hubert remarked in solemn tones.

“Even so, my son,” replied the Padre, with passionate earnestness, “for hear me once again—there are good men and women found out of the Church, but a saint never. There is no salvation out of the Apostolic Church—no man, woman, or child can, or ever has been saved, unless it is by the will of our holy mother Church, and beneath her sheltering wing.”

The holy Hubert bowed his head in mute acquiescence. Robert groaned :

“Oh, Padre! Padre! help me to win over the blinded, misguided one to the true fold!”

“But in case she will not hear me,” said the Padre.

“She must, she will hear you in time !” exclaimed Robert, bitterly. “Visit her daily, father : oh ! give her not up, though the work cost days, nay years of the wisest, most solemn persuasion !”

“My son, it shall be even as you wish ; and should our prayers and entreaties avail, great will be the church’s triumph ; then with ease shall we persuade our daughter to seek an asylum among the church’s chosen ones, and you will be free to enrol yourself a worthy son, a bright ornament among the church’s working members ; and thus though for ever parted from earth’s ties, you will be one in holiness, faithfulness and love !”

Then did the Padre, with glowing countenance and tones of animation discant on the heavenliness of the church, her purity, her zeal, her antiquity, her divine origin—her charitableness—her love—and the joyful triumph of the faithful who continue firm to the end, the transcendental glories they shall receive, the dazzling crown—the high place in heaven !

Robert heard all with breathless eagerness, and with a flush of painful excitement on his face. He parted with the priest's blessing upon him, and went back to his dreary rooms to find his wife, that "lost heretic" reading by the light of a dismal lamp, with sweet and composed mien, from a well-worn Bible, a description of the heavenly glories as depicted in the Apocalypse, and of the martyrs who shall tread the golden streets of the heavenly city.



## CHAPTER VI.

Firm faith and deep submission to high Heaven  
Will teach us to endure without a murmur  
What seems so hard.

W. MORE.

TRUE to his promise, Padre Anastasio visited daily at Aylmer's rooms, and conversed with fervour, zeal and enthusiasm. Plainly and without any disguise he told Lucy she was lost—then showed her salvation, not by the Cross, but by membership with the one Catholic church. With untiring patience and gentleness, Lucy heard this strange and startling doctrine; which, however, made not the slightest impression upon her. Her faith, founded on the Bible, was as firm as a rock; neither persecution nor tribulation could shake it.

Outwardly the Padre was very composed and respectful in his manner towards Lucy ; but in his inmost heart he oftentimes longed to shake her, and thought if he had her once within the pale of his own church, how many severe penances he would inflict on her, for her obstinate heresy. Besides the Padre's harassing, tedious visits, the Lady Anne also contributed her share towards making Lucy's life miserable, the Padre having persuaded her Ladyship to aid him in the work of conversion ; but she did not play her part at all skilfully, her proud nature could not humble itself, nor her cold heart soften. She had not yet learned jesuitical tact ; instead of pursuing a circuitous course to explain her meaning in haughty words, she expressed it at once, thereby distressing Lucy, and so defeating her object, which was to persuade Lucy to consent to a separation, and enter a convent, or in case she continued obstinate in her creed, to return to England.

Lady Anne's visits were even more painful than the Padre's ; and to avoid them Lucy took long and frequent walks, till the hour for Lady Anne's drive had passed by ; and then the forlorn girl crept home, her strength

exhausted, and her mind saddened by the solitude. All her life-time she had been the object of the tenderest love, and now she no longer experienced this, she pined imperceptibly after it.

Privations also added to her declining health; every luxury, nay, every comfort to which she had been accustomed, she denied herself, that she might have more to spend on her husband and child. Sir Edgar's legacy was handsome; but it slipped fast through her fingers. Numberless demands were made on her husband for charities and donations to various churches, and these Robert dared not refuse, having been himself supported so long at the church's expense. It was almost enough to make that staunch old Protestant, Sir Edgar, rise from his grave, to see the way his legacy to the "pretty little Miss Neville" was fast falling into the hands of that very church he so hated and abhorred.

It was the festival of All Saints, Robert's birth-day. Lucy had made him some pretty book-markers, and purchased a bouquet to grace the breakfast table. Robert's spirits seemed to revive with her cheerfulness, and

to Lucy's joy he proposed to take a walk with her, a treat she had never once enjoyed during her three months' residence in Rome.

"We must not go very far, or you will be tired," said Robert.

"Not with you," she replied. "I am never weary where you are, Robert."

"Poor Lucy, you do not see much of me," he said. "My church is exacting, she requires a great deal of a soul that desires to be saved, that is her only fault—but hush! I should not have said this," he added, looking round in alarm.

"We are quite alone, Robert," Lucy said, with a pitying expression on her countenance.

"One never knows when one is alone here, it is such a bustling place," Robert replied, still casting his eyes nervously around.

"Do you like Rome better than Forsted, Robert?" Lucy asked timidly.

"The flesh does not, but for the spirit this surely is the best abode. Whoever saw piety in Forsted, such as one sees here?"

"Robert dear," Lucy said in a grave tone, "I do not see the piety."

"That is because you know so few, but the Padre Anastasio, for example. Who in England shows such concern for souls as he does for yours, my Lucy? Oh! resist him no longer!"

"I must, Robert dear, even to the end," Lucy replied. Her face grew paler, her brave heart fluttered and trembled as she added, "my own dear husband, to please you I would do anything, promise anything, but renounce my faith. I dare not, for when all things else fail, that is my only support."

"If I only thought heretics could reach heaven!" Robert murmured in a tone of intense sorrow.

"When we are called home, we shall find many there we never expected to meet," Lucy gravely replied.

"I wish I could think so," Robert said doubtfully.

"Darling Robert," Lucy added with a smile, "love hopeth all things!"

"It does—it does!" exclaimed Robert, "and my love for you hopes you will one day,

and that soon, be a true daughter of our Holy Church !” he rose and looked from the window.

Lucy remained still, her hands folded, her eyes closed ; and she prayed, as oft she did, a silent, unuttered prayer, which in her great perplexity and trouble could only frame the imploring words, “ My Father, my Father !” A voice seemed to answer, “ Here am I, be not afraid ;” and with that her fainting heart revived, and she feared not, but held on again valiantly. That morning, her old home life seemed almost returned to her again.

Robert read aloud to Lucy from a book of miscellaneous poems, a favourite with them in their early days ; after that he had a romp with his child ; but Robert, worn and weak by fasting, and the many austerities of his life, was soon fatigued by the frolicsome, robust boy ; and as a change, he proposed to Lucy their promised walk. How the little wife’s face lighted up as she went with alacrity to put on her bonnet. Tears of joy were actually glistening in those soft eyes. The day was damp and colder than it had yet been ; and as Lucy was getting out from a box her winter

shawl, her heart beat quicker, for the well-known step and sonorous voice of the Padre Anastasio fell like a knell on her ear from the adjoining room. She hastily completed her toilet, and hurried in. How the expression of Robert's countenance had changed! Something of its old byegone untroubled *abandon* had returned during the morning, but alas! now it was all fled, giving place to fear and abject submission.

"Lucy," he said, "in the worldly spirit that was creeping over me, I had forgotten—may the Holy Saints pardon me!"

Here he performed the sign of the cross—"that to-day is their especial festival. The Holy Father has awakened me from my lethargy, and I now accompany him to the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, to witness the blessed ceremony."

There was an expression on Lucy's face that Robert never forgot, as she said in low tones, in which tenderness and upbraiding were mingled: "Then you will not walk with me to-day?"

"I wonder you can ask it," interrupted the Padre sternly; "miserable woman, you

are not content with the ruin of your own soul;—but you must hinder the salvation of your husband!”

Robert trembled; his lips grew white; but he dared not say anything to the priest in remonstrance.

Lucy, his fearless, child-like wife, resting one hand on the table for support, and with the other caressing her child who had come towards her, said in respectful tones, “Padre, neither you nor I, nor any human being upon earth can put forth a finger in saving or condemning the soul of another—we are all sinful, clergy and laity, alike; and unless God please to save us, we can have no hope of heaven; but should our Father condescend to look down with pity upon any, and change their hearts, whether it be Jew or Heathen, Roman Catholic or Protestant, he can and will be saved. In the church in Heaven, we shall meet saints arrayed in white robes from every quarter of the globe, north, south, east and west. All shall send souls to glory; and we shall never dispute then about forms and ceremonies, but we shall find everlasting peace.” She ceased, and such a light played



in her eyes, that she seemed to have come down to earth from the heaven of which she spoke.

The Padre did not upbraid her; but he crossed himself more than once on leaving the room, and murmured in a low voice, "She is mad!" And blindly Robert followed the fanatical old man, and left again his patient, heretic wife; but her fair face haunted him throughout the remainder of that day.

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"It is Robert's birth-day," Maude said, as the first of November came round at Forsted.

"Ah! I wonder what he is doing with himself, the young good-for-nothing!" was the Squire's rejoinder. He and Maude were walking together the oft-taken walk along the Arminster road.

"Let me see, it is a saint's day to-day," Maude said. "'All Saints!' of course, they are celebrated with due pomp in Rome."

"No folly is too great," muttered the Squire. "I wish that lad would come and bring my Lucy back. Then I should not care if

Rome stood on its head, or did any monstrous thing. But I don't like my Lucy being exiled there—it does not bear thinking of.”

“She expresses herself contentedly in her letters,” observed Maude; “though they are almost too much occupied with general subjects to be satisfactory.”

“I almost wish Lucy were a grumbler; then we should discover the real state of things,” said the Squire. “I often think there is a kind of reserve in her letters, as if something were kept back.”

“Really, papa, we must hope the best,” was Maude's reply. “Lucy is too good for any lasting harm to come to her.”

“Heigho!” sighed the Squire, “I wish every girl would be an old maid, and stop at home. I am sure it is the best place.”

Maude laughed and coloured.

“You may laugh, Missey, if you like,” continued the Squire; “but you know yourself it would have been ten thousand times better if our poor little Lucy had remained with me, and never seen that rascal of a husband of hers.”

“Lucy would tell you everything that

happens is for the best," replied Maude. "It was a pet saying of the poor dear child, though I confess I cannot always see it so. But, papa, who would have thought that Robert would turn out as he did?"

"Aye, no; such a promising young fellow as he was! How he did dote upon her! I never saw such lovers as they were, and happy married folks too for the two first years. It was like going to heaven to be inside their house! Not an angry word anywhere, even among the servants, who always swore they never had such a master or mistress before, and never expected to find them again. Lor me! how this world changes!"

"You must not change too, papa!" Maude said.

"What do you mean, Maude, my queen?" exclaimed her father, turning round towards her.

"I mean, do not become dull, whatever happens. It is not your nature, papa."

"I know it is not. But I cannot help feeling down sometimes when I think of my Lucy. A man does not like his daughters to be used as she has been. It goes against a

man's whole nature." The Squire broke off with a whistle.

"I wonder how much longer Aunt Augusta is going to remain at the Fairfields!" Maude said.

"I can't see the fun she finds in being there at all," replied her father. "If I were a single woman, it would bore my life out, to have young Fairfield dangling after me."

"But you know Aunt Augusta likes admiration," said Maude.

"Bless my soul! that she does!" the Squire laughed. "I never saw such a girl as Augusta. Well, she has had her day of it."

"Auntie would not be very well pleased if she heard you," said Maude. "She counts upon many another season."

"Ha! there goes Erresford!" exclaimed the Squire, as Cecil rode out by a gate leading from the St. Agnes woods on to the Arminster road.

Maude's cheeks reddened, as she said:

"He does not see us."

"Doesn't he though!" replied the Squire.

Cecil wheeled his horse round, and rode quickly up to them.

“Are you going to walk to Arminster, Miss Neville?” Cecil said playfully, as he dismounted and shook hands with her and the Squire.

Maude smiled “We have ridden so much lately,” she replied, “that we are giving the horses a rest, and are going to wander along the hills for a change.”

“What a capital horse you have got there,” said the Squire.

“Yes, he is a first-rate fellow. I bought him last week of Captain Prescott for my brother; and De Walden wishes me to ride him once or twice to be certain he has no tricks.”

The Squire walked up to the horse, patted him, smoothed his mane, and said :

“You are a good stepper, my fine fellow, I see.”

“Mount him, Mr. Neville,” said Cecil, “and give your opinion of his paces.”

The Squire did not require to be invited twice. He was up in a minute, took Cecil’s whip, and rode off along the steep road.

Cecil watched him a moment, then turned to Maude.

“Have you received news from Rome lately?” he asked.

“We had our own weekly letter yesterday. Poor Lucy writes peacefully; yet I am convinced she is not happy.” Maude took a letter from her pocket and opened it. “Just listen to this page,” she said, walking slowly on as she read: “‘We live a quiet life, unbroken by any excitement. Dear Robert is necessarily much from home, as his Church imposes upon him the attendance on many services. I am sure people must think him very good; for they seem to take so much interest in his welfare. Even Lady Anne Erresford speaks pleasingly of him. You will be grieved to learn that he has grown very thin and pale. How a breath of dear Forsted air would revive him! Perhaps our sweet hill-side air may blow on us sooner than we expect. I have a sort of presentiment that I am going home. Sometimes it comes over me so strongly that I can scarcely refrain from packing up our things. No Forsted breezes could possibly suit my

Harry better than this air does. He is a complete “young England”—such rosy cheeks and coral lips! and he has spirits enough to prevent any one being dull. He grows daily more like dear papa. I wish he could see his ‘little Phil;’ but, perhaps, he would spoil him. All grandpapas do! Stevens and I often talk of you all, and try to fancy what you are doing, particularly on Sunday afternoon, when I imagine you and dear papa taking our old walks among the hills, and up the stony lanes. It seems but yesterday that I walked with you—only yesterday since Robert took possession of his living.

“‘But I must not look back—I find it is a bad habit. Look onward and look upward, that is best. Looking backward plunges me into day-dreams, and unfits me for daily occupations, whereas looking forward makes me feel hopeful: and looking upward—oh! Maude, darling, it makes me feel strong-hearted, peaceful, and thankful!

“‘I wish you would send me some autumn leaves from the old beech-tree—any little mementoes of Forsted are precious—and tell me all about my poor old women, and if Tawney

still dozes away his days on the door-mat. Dear old doggie ! how often I have sat by his side, with one hand over his neck, while with the other I fed him with pieces of meat begged with difficulty from our inexorable cook ! I had no idea of the strength of Sarah's affection for me, till we came to part ; then—oh ! the tears !—how every one cried ! What a joyful day it will be when we return ! Over again, at the risk of being tedious, I must tell you how strong my presentiment is, that my own dear husband will yet preach in old St. Walburga. What a day of rejoicing that would be !

“ ‘ If Mr. Erresford is at Castle St. Agnes, do make him my most affectionate regards. I sometimes fancy if he were to come to Rome, he might have an influence over Robert, counteracting that of Padre Anastasio. Influence for good must in the end overpower the ill. The more I see of the Roman Catholic Church, the more I shudder at the thought that he who is dearer to me than my own life, should be in its trammels ; but God can take him out of them, impossible though it now seems, surrounded as he is by priestly



influence, which has a strange fascination over so many. People, once within its power, do not even think for themselves!

“ ‘ But, dear me, what a long letter this is! I must conclude it hastily, and give dear papa the rest of my paper. Fare-thee-well, best of sisters! Pray for me every day, and particularly in church on Sunday, as then I am always praying for you. Ask for me that I may be patient and humble, and ‘ fight the good fight,’ so that I may receive a crown of reward. How the dear old martyrs used to sing through everything! Whenever I find myself disagreeable, and inclined to complain, I think of them and sing. Then I forget all around, and feel myself almost in Heaven!’ ”

Here Maude paused. She looked at Cecil, and—could she be mistaken?—She fancied he hurried away a tear. Her own eyes glistened.

“ Is she not an angel?” Maude exclaimed.

“ She is, indeed!” Cecil said. He looked very thoughtful as he added, “ I wish we had her safely here.”

The Squire, who had been riding on far a-head, now came trotting back. Maude hastily put her letter again in her pocket.

"I would give a couple of hundred for him, any day," the Squire said.

Cecil smiled, but he looked abstracted as he replied :

"Then I was not cheated."

Cecil's thoughts were far away in Rome. Lucy's letter sounded to him prophetic ; she was more fit for Heaven than earth. He shuddered at the thought. There was nothing terrible in death connected with Lucy Aylmer, but there was something very sad in the idea of one so young dying far away from kindred and home ! Why did such gloomy thoughts enter Cecil's mind ? He did not know ; but when once they were there, he could not get rid of them—they haunted him ; and Lucy's message haunted him. Could he be of any use to Robert ? Could he overpower the Padre's reasonings ? Hard task though this seemed, he would try.

Cecil's friendship was very strong within him, and it carried him that very week away from the Forsted hills. And Maude—and

Maude ! did he mind parting from her ? We ask the Forsted hills the reason why, and, instead of answering our words, echo seems to cry, “ Why not ? ”

## CHAPTER VII.

“ Oh ! art thou here ? Come here to see me !

. . . . . Too, too kind ! ”

“ I fear, I fear

Thou art not as I would—tears in thine eyes,

And anguish in thy face ! How hast thou fared ? ”

JOANNA BAILLIE.

AN organ filled the arches with its heavenly strains, and the voices of priests and choristers sounded melodiously. The subdued light among the lines of beautiful columns, the exquisitely decorated roof, the altars, the pictures, dazzled and attracted even the eyes of an *habitué* who strolled along, loitering here and there to drink in the strain that floated on the air. A priest passed by with a

scowl on his brow ; close after the priest came a young man with eyes fixed on the ground, who saw nothing, but his own torturing thoughts. Then came some more priests also eyeing the ground, and when these had passed, the loiterer strolled on, and as he strolled, he came suddenly upon a small figure, solitary and alone, sitting on the basement of one of Santa Maria Maggiore's huge pillars. Her head leant heavily against the cold stone, her hands were clasped together in her lap, and her eyes, heavenly and bright, glanced far away, as though she already saw into the land of spirits. The priest in the marble chapel with book and bell, incense and genuflections, had no apparent interest for her ; but the music rolling gloriously along—so vividly exquisite to the ear, that the eyes were spontaneously lifted, as if the sounds were wings and floated on the air, though it had little charm for the praying zealous devotees, yet seemed sent by heaven expressly as a balm to soothe the heart's woes of the silent, suffering stranger. An elderly lady in mourning, who, book in hand, was passing slowly along, paused and looked in pity and

amazement, at the small, still figure, alone in the shade and beauty of that grand old church, but she too passed by, and still Lucy remained. The *habitué* also stood a few moments near her, but seeing she did not raise her eyes, he turned away, and continued his stroll, always, however, seeming to keep her in view. But with untiring patience, she sat alone in the silent aisle, if perchance she might catch her husband's glance, and be able to bestow on him a loving smile; but he passed her by on his exit with studiously averted head. She watched him gone with a band of dark-clad, dark-browed companions; and when the poor deluded worshippers had streamed away, she rose to depart, with the look nearest approaching despair, that had ever appeared on her fair young face. She glanced around the lofty aisles, she cast her gaze up at the fretted roof, and let it linger there, blinded by her tears; then to her mind came the thought, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." It came so vividly, so like reality, that she almost fancied she heard it spoken: she turned round instinctively, but no one was near. The autumn day was

beginning to close in ; she thought her little Harry would be missing her at home, and walked with quick, but uneven steps, towards the great portico. Suddenly some one addressed her.

“Mrs. Aylmer !” Surprise made her tremble as she saw Cecil before her. Was he to bring back the joy at last ? “I have been trying to make you see me for at least ten minutes,” he said, in his cheerful voice. “I began to revolve in my own mind the probability of your intending to pass the night in this cold church.”

“It becomes so soon dark now,” Lucy replied, “but you cannot think how you surprised me. You were the last person I expected to meet here.”

“It was a sudden freak of mine, this visit ; but I must not keep you in the draught of this door. You will not refuse me the pleasure of seeing you home ? We can converse as we go along.” Lucy took his offered arm. “I arrived here this morning,” he continued, “and have been trying to find Robert, assiduously hunting him up, but in vain, at length, in this church, I discovered him ; but

he was so hemmed in with priests, there was no approaching him.

Lucy sighed but did not speak.

“Do you expect to find Robert at home?” Cecil asked.

“I scarcely think it probable,” she replied, “though I cannot tell. I have seen him very little this week.”

“Mrs. Aylmer,” Cecil began, “you must excuse my so suddenly entering upon family affairs ; but is Robert still under priestly guidance? If so, I have come to Rome expressly for his sake, to use my utmost powers to liberate him from their grasp.”

Lucy’s look expressed the gratitude for which she had no words. “Poor Robert !” she sighed, “he would be very different if it were not for Father Anastasio ”

“To what purpose does he devote his time ?” Cecil asked.

“When I came, he was preparing for the priesthood,” she replied. “What he does now, I scarcely know.”

“Poor fellow !” murmured Cecil, “what arguments does he bring forth in favour of his extraordinary change ?”



"None!" replied Lucy, "he only talks of the blessedness of belonging to the Romish Church."

"Does the Padre Anastasio often visit him at his own residence?" asked Cecil again.

"Robert is very seldom at home; but the Padre comes to me frequently, and so does Lady Anne. They want me to go into a convent," Lucy said, sadly.

Cecil almost stood still with amazement, exclaiming: "Want you to enter a convent, Mrs. Aylmer?"

"You see, Robert would be at liberty to enter the priesthood then," Lucy meekly replied.

"Upon my word!" Cecil said. "I had no idea it had come to this. I should think between my sister and the priest, you are very much persecuted?"

"I did not like it at first, but I bear it pretty well now," she said, with a sweet, childlike smile.

"No one would bear it so beautifully but yourself," he exclaimed, while his face was still flushed with indignation at her treatment.

“What would you have me do?” she replied, again smiling. “I cannot refuse to see the Padre every time he chooses to come, though my maid did send him away yesterday, without letting me know; for I was tired and asleep after dinner. She told him,” continued Lucy, “that I could not be disturbed for any one. Stevens is braver than I should have been.”

“Bravo, Stevens!” exclaimed Cecil, good-mouredly.

“She is a dreadful enemy to the Padre,” said Lucy; “and one day when she thought he had been persecuting me longer than usual, in his efforts for my conversion, she let a box fall heavily in the adjoining room to attract my attention, and while I ran to see what was the matter, the Padre went; but he carried off my brown Bible, which I had left on the table with him. But if he were to take all the Bibles in the universe from my sight, he could never take the precepts out of my heart!” she added, fervently.

“What a thieving scoundrel!” said Cecil, indignantly.

“He is extremely kind in his way to Robert, and he is generally very civil to me,” Lucy remarked, as if by way of excuse.

“He ought always to be so, I think,” replied Cecil. He was silent for some minutes, and when he spoke again, it was not of Rome but of Forsted.

Lucy’s present severe trials had, if possible, strengthened her love of home, and she had many questions to ask about her father and Maude. These were all satisfactorily answered, and by that time they had reached the house where Lucy lived. She invited Cecil in, but no Robert was there. Cecil could not help contrasting her snug parsonage home with the dull floor high up in a gloomy street.

Lucy’s neat hand and pretty taste were visible about the room ; but there was a bareness and a lack of comforts that were distressing to him.

“Ah !” he said to himself, “it is well her father and Maude cannot see this !”

Lucy had gone to fetch her little boy, and Cecil opened some books on a side table.

“ George Herbert,” and “ Longfellow’s Poems,” these were Lucy’s ; but “ Lives of the Saints,” and “ Services to the Saints,” with divers other books bearing extraordinary titles, these belonged to her misguided husband.

While Cecil was looking at these, Lucy returned. She had removed her bonnet and cloak ; and then, for the first time, Cecil was struck with the startling change that had taken place in her. Her face had become very thin and pale, and her soft eyes wore an imploring look, as if she were always pleading with some one ; but a beautiful, laughing boy bounded forward, then retreated, hiding himself in his mother’s dress ; and Cecil’s mind was diverted from Lucy to his little godson.

It grew dark, and tea was brought in, but no Robert made his appearance. Suddenly Lucy remembered, that on Saturday evening the Marchesa Elmo always held a reception.

“ Ah ! now I remember she does,” exclaimed Cecil. “ I shall go there myself ; undoubtedly I shall meet Robert. I never

knew Anastasio miss an evening, when I have been in Rome before."

"Oh! I hope you will see Robert!" Lucy said anxiously.

"You may depend I will, Mrs. Aylmer. Robert shall not escape me," Cecil replied smiling. "I will try and see if I cannot be a match for old Anastasio."

"The Padre seems a person of strange fascinations to members of his own church. Lady Anne idolizes him."

"Anne is a wilful girl; but Robert's faults are only weakness of character and impressibility. I have known him well from boyhood. He is deeply sensible of persuasion and kindness; and you may depend he is just the sort of person to be easily led away, and easily brought back."

"I am very glad you have come," Lucy said in a hopeful tone.

"I could not rest quietly any longer," he replied. "Robert wants some strong hand to extricate him from the web in which he is entangled. I wish we could get him away from this place."

"Oh, so do I!" Lucy exclaimed eagerly.

“We will try,” Cecil said. “Good night, Mrs. Aylmer; good night, little Harry—you must not hide away from me when I come again?”

“Good-bye—good-bye!” shouted the little fellow, as Lucy held open the door, that the light might fall on Cecil down the gloomy dark staircase. She heard his footsteps retreat into the street; and with little Harry still repeating “good-byes” in a whisper to himself, she went back into her own room again, and smiled as she caught sight of herself in an old mirror—her face wore such a hopeful, happy expression.

Cecil went to the Marchesa’s reception. It was late when he arrived. The first person he encountered was his sister.

“Ah! Anne,” he exclaimed, “you look amazed at seeing me here!”

“I am amazed, Cecil, at nothing you do,” she answered. “Did you leave my mother and De Walden well?”

“Flourishing both. I saw Flora before I left, and she seems in improved spirits.”

“No bad thing,” said Lady Anne, dryly. “Have you seen the Aylmers?”

“Lucy and her boy ; but I have not been able to find Robert.”

“He is somewhere here with the Padre Anastasio ; he looks miserably ill. I think his foolish child of a wife must be a trial to him.”

“I will not allow you to say so, Anne,” said Cecil gravely. “If one has a trial in the other—Lucy has it in him.”

“I suppose she has been complaining,” remarked her Ladyship, with a look of contempt.

“Did you ever hear her utter a single complaint of any one, much less of her husband?” said Cecil earnestly.

“No !” Lady Anne replied, “for she has no one to complain of—but herself.”

“I thought you had more feeling, Anne,” her brother said with a sigh.

“In some respects, I do feel for the poor little misguided thing. I feel for her obstinacy in withstanding all the efforts made for her conversion.”

“I rejoice she does withstand them—brave soul ! She will have her reward ! ‘Blessed are they which suffer for righteousness

sake!" Lady Anne shrugged her shoulders and turned away. Cecil looked after her a compassionate look; then, seeing her stand still, alone, he followed her and said, in the most winning tones of his peculiarly winning voice: "Anne, I really do care for you; do not shun me. We differ widely in faith, I regret it deeply. But we might be united in a true and kindly brotherly and sisterly love, one for the other." Lady Anne's lip curled with a supercilious smile, as she said:

"Really, Cecil, one would imagine we were children!"

"Surely as we advance in years, we need lose none of childhood's warmth?" Cecil replied.

"Worthy brother!" she said; "have you not yet learned there are divers temperaments in this great world?"

"Worthy Anne!" Cecil rejoined playfully, "I have learned there would be many warmer, truer hearts in this world, if they were not self-crushed!"

"I prefer calm, good sense to sentiment," Lady Anne said. "I despise sentiment."



“ You include earthly affection under that term, Anne ? ”

“ Earthly affection is well and good enough in its place, but not when it is made an idol, and worshipped in the stead of holy things. ”

“ I would rather make an idol of my wife than of a saint, ” Cecil said rather warmly.

“ When does the marriage take place ? ” asked her ladyship, satirically.

“ When the Lady Anne will come and add to the happiness of the ceremony by her presence, ” replied the not to be provoked Cecil.

“ Perhaps I shall invite you to mine before then, ” she said.

“ To yours, Anne ! ” exclaimed Cecil.

“ Yes, ” she replied, to mine ; “ but I aspire to no common bridegroom. I shall never approach the hymeneal altar, but to wed myself to Heaven ! ”

Cecil gazed at her in amazement, and while he looked, she turned away.

“ Can it be possible, ” he said aloud, “ that I shall ever have the sorrow and humiliation of seeing a sister of mine enter a convent ? ”

He walked across the rooms with a cloud hanging o'er his brow; suddenly he came upon Robert. The lynx-eyed Padre was not very far off.

"Well, Robert, old fellow, we have met again, at last!" Cecil exclaimed, shaking him warmly by the hand.

"An unexpected pleasure!" replied Robert, who turned pale as he rose to welcome his former friend.

"I have been twice to your quarters to-day, in the hope of finding you," Cecil said, "and, at last, I began to despair."

"I am necessarily very much from home," Robert replied.

"A shocking confession for a married man to make!" remarked Cecil good-temperedly. "I should have thought with such a wife and boy as yours, you would have been completely occupied with them."

"Duty first, and pleasure afterwards!" Robert replied with a faint smile.

"We must first define the meaning of the words 'duty and pleasure,'" Cecil said cheerfully.

Robert sighed, and looked round to Padre

Anastasio. The Padre, however, was apparently deep in conversation with the holy Hubert, and bent his head down in wrapt attention to the discourse of that worthy.

“I have missed you dreadfully from Forsted, Aylmer,” Cecil said. “It is the place of all others that I love best, and the place where I like my friends to congregate.”

“Have you been residing there lately?” Robert asked.

“Why, yes, I found Hatchworth dull and solitary ; and my brother likes me to stay as much as possible at St. Agnes. My mother is at Wood Hall at present, entertaining a house full of guests, Sangford and Flora among them. Now, Aylmer, you have a short sketch of the family whereabouts.”

Robert smiled.

“And the Manor party ! Have you good news of them ?”

“Oh ! they are flourishing ; but a little bit anxious about you and your Lucy.”

“I am surprised at that,” said Robert, “as they hear so often from Lucy.”

And soon did Cecil and Robert converse

uninterrupted by priestly interference till a late hour. It would not have been politic, had Padre Anastasio joined them. It might appear to Cecil as if he watched Robert ; and the Padre, who played his part well, avoided scrupulously every appearance of this ; though covertly and cautiously he noticed and heard all that passed between the two young men.

Cecil insisted, when the hour came for his departure, that Robert should leave with him. He would take no refusal, and, moreover, Cecil would have Robert alone.

They walked through the streets quickly, till they reached the hotel, where Cecil had taken up his quarters, and which was not far distant from the Marchesa's palace.

They both went in. Cecil said it would remind him of old times, if they supped together. Robert sat passively down in an arm-chair in Cecil's room. Cecil reposed himself at full length on a sofa, while the supper was being prepared, and then he exclaimed :

“ Well, Bob, you see I am at my old trick again, of not leaving you to yourself ! ”

“ Did you come to Rome expressly to see me ? ” Robert asked, braver now he was out of

sight of the Padre, at once his terror and his veneration.

“Expressly,” replied Cecil. “I wanted to see what you were about; you must be awfully dull here in Rome. It is bad for your health and spirits to live up in that dingy house, and court solitude in choosing such a home!”

“Thank you, it suits me very well,” was Robert’s rejoinder.

“You look as if it suited you very ill. I should think you weigh many pounds lighter than when I saw you last. You appear half-starved. I will wager you are not the kind of fellow to stand too many fast days!”

Robert looked up at Cecil’s cheerful, handsome countenance—he had expected questionings and rebuke, and was utterly taken by surprise at the joking pleasant tone in which he found himself addressed.

“How you do call back old days, Bob!” Cecil went on. “Eton, Oxford, vacation trips, all return as vividly to my mind as if they had only just happened. What a

wretched fellow you always were, to look after your own concerns; and such a nice easy prey to avaricious old landladies!

Robert laughed.

"Do you recollect those double bills at Oxford, and how meekly you were going to pay them over again—till I took you in hand?"

Robert smiled as he replied, "You often came to the rescue."

"I have come for that now, Bob. I am tired of dancing after my lady mother from Essex to Somerset, *und so weiter*, and nothing pleased my head better than an idea which took possession of it, to endeavour to find you out. You bad fellow never to write to me! And then I intended to ask you and Mrs. Aylmer to take a little tour with me somewhere or other. What do you think of the plan?"

"There is so much to consider before I can move from here," Robert replied in a dolorous tone.

"Aylmer, you are past the age for leading strings now," Cecil said. "Be your own

master, my dear fellow ; if you choose to accompany me, there is nothing to prevent you."

Robert looked down as he replied, " I must consult my friends."

" What friends, Bob ?" Cecil asked, rising on his elbow, and fixing on Robert's puzzled timid countenance his honest gaze.

" I do not think you are acquainted with their names ; and, therefore, it is useless mentioning them," Robert replied in a hurried tone.

" Why, bless you, Aylmer, I knew old Anastasio before I knew you—and he stands at the head of the list. Now, confess, it is no use to endeavour to keep secrets from me, is it, Bob ?"

" Padre Anastasio has been unboundedly kind, and so have others of his brethren with whom I have become acquainted."

Cecil rose up suddenly, and putting his hands on Robert's shoulders, said in a tone between argument and reproof, " Aylmer, has not your wife been very kind to you ?"

Robert started ; and two deep white lines

settled round his mouth. He did not speak, and Cecil went on.

“It is not. No, it really is not fair to leave your poor little wife all alone for days and days together, with no one to protect her but her maid. It is not like a man, Aylmer, it is not indeed !”

Cecil spoke in an earnest, straightforward manner, beneath which Robert seemed cowed.

“Surely, Bob, because you change your creed, that need not alter your love? First to leave her, and then, when she joins you, almost to forsake her ; and to allow her to be tortured by the visits of a proselytizing priest, and my misguided sister ; and such an unoffending little wife as yours is ! If you did not intend to treat her better, upon my word, you should not have married her !”

“There I erred !” replied Robert in a stifled tone. “You cannot upbraid me more than I do myself.”

“I do not see why you should have acted otherwise. You had loved her all your life. What has she done to change you so suddenly ?”



“Oh ! nothing, nothing !” Robert murmured ; “ but Erresford, it is impossible—you cannot understand. You cannot know all the causes, the reasons—”

“ Then I am to understand that you have ceased to love your wife ?” said Cecil coldly.

“ No, never !” Robert exclaimed, while the colour rushed to his hollow, pale cheeks.

“ Forgive me those hasty words, Aylmer,” Cecil continued ; “ but when I think of your wife as I saw her this afternoon—forlorn, neglected—yet bearing all with the patience of an angel, and remember what she was when I saw her first, her life happy and cloudless, the contrast makes me mad ! Only consider quietly what would your feelings be, if you went to her now in sorrow for all the grief you have occasioned her, and saw her dead, and knew that you yourself were the cause ! that you, who had promised and vowed to protect and cherish her, had from coldness, and neglect, broken her heart !”

Robert trembled from head to foot.

“ It is a fearful thing,” Cecil went on ; “ it

makes me shudder to think of it! But I must make you acquainted, Aylmer, with what your wife's maid told me, only a few hours ago—that lately your Lucy has been attacked by strange, sudden fits of fainting. Last week, I think it was, she became insensible for so long, that her maid called a doctor, and he told Stevens, in confidence, one of these fits might carry her off!”

Cecil's voice was husky as he uttered these words. He turned away, and paced up and down the room.

“Oh! why was I never told this before?” Robert exclaimed bitterly.

“Because,” replied Cecil, “your devoted wife, who thinks and cares so much more for you than you do for her, would not have you distressed by the knowledge of her illness. Mind, she knows nothing herself of what the doctor said. Stevens told me when Mrs. Aylmer was out of the room.”

Cowed, stupified, and bewildered, Robert remained gazing on the floor. Cecil's flashing eyes were fixed upon him at each turn. Suddenly he paused in his walk, and standing before Robert, he exclaimed :

“From boyhood till now, we have been to each other as friend and brother. I should be unworthy those names, did I leave you to pursue your own headstrong course without putting forth a hand to save you.”

Still silence, still averted look, and bent-down head!

“Aylmer, answer me one question: will you continue to give your sanction to Padre Anastasio’s daily visits of torturing persuasions to induce your young wife to leave you?”

“Padre Anastasio is his own master. I dare not dictate to him,” was Robert’s answer.

“Flesh and blood cannot stand this!” Cecil exclaimed. “Aylmer, is this man so dear to you, that you suffer him to become the torment of your Lucy’s perhaps fast-fleeting life? Oh, Robert! you were wont to be so tender-hearted once, you could not even bear to hear of any suffering; and do you now disregard all the agony and sorrow which the Lucy whom your young days idolized, suffers in your absence?”

Cecil’s voice, Cecil’s words, touched a

chord in Robert's poor, stifled heart. He threw himself on his knees by the table, on which his head sank heavily; and the walls of that gilded room echoed back his repentant sobs.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Forbear such wild and frantic sorrow now,  
And speak to her while she is sensible,  
And can receive thy words. She looks on thee,  
And looks imploringly.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

It was the Sabbath morning: the clock had struck one. Robert bade Cecil good-night at the entrance to his house, and ascended alone the dull, dark staircase. He was in a very different frame of mind than he would have been if he had had the Padre Anastasio for his companion. Cecil had filled his heart with soft thoughts towards his wife—such gentle thoughts, that, in his great repentance for the wrongs he had done her, and the sorrow he had caused, he was

actually planning to remove her from Rome, not to Forsted, but to some equally quiet English village, where he would atone for his past neglect by his kind, loving conduct ; and if she interfered not with his worship, the least he could do, as Cecil told him, was to allow her to continue her holy life, undisturbed, in the faith of her fathers.

He had come to the bold conclusion, under Cecil's protection, not to take the counsels of the Padre concerning his wife. How could the Padre tell what he felt towards her, or know what was the duty of a husband? Robert opened the sitting-room door very softly, and in a very penitent frame, with a loving speech already prepared for his Lucy. For the first time since her residence in Rome, she had not sat up for him. He was alarmed, and remained a moment looking around the room. From the adjoining apartment sounds of voices issued. He knew not why, but his heart died within him, and he stood still, trembling, with a dull, foreboding feeling of ill hanging over him.

The door of Lucy's room slowly opened, and an elderly man, looking very grave, came

out. Robert felt as if he should sink to the ground, as he recognized an English physician, whom Padre Anastasio had pointed out to him only a few days previously. Robert's face was pale and haggard, and the stern expression the doctor wore, was instantly changed to one of pity.

"Your wife has been very ill, Mr. Aylmer," he said, in a low tone.

Robert stared at him a moment, then in an agitated voice asked.

"What has happened?"

The doctor handed him a chair, and made him sit down.

"You must be as composed as possible," he said, "a great deal depends upon you. Mrs. Aylmer has had a very severe fainting fit from which I feared we should never rouse her."

He looked at Robert, whose lips quivered.

"May I not go to her?" were all the words they could frame.

"Yes, presently! but you must wait until you are perfectly calm—poor lady, the first word she spoke on recovering, was your name!"

Robert looked completely stunned.

“She will get better?” he said, fixing his eyes eagerly on the doctor’s countenance.

“Disease of the heart is to be feared,” was the reply, while a tear glistened in the eye of the speaker. “I have noticed her Sunday after Sunday at the English church, and admired the patient, sweet expression of her countenance, wondering who she was.”

“I was just thinking of taking her home to England,” Robert murmured.

“It is a pity she was ever taken from England,” was the short reply. The doctor rose and went back to Lucy’s room, and Robert was left alone. He did not invoke the Virgin Mary nor the Saints in this hour of trial ; but the cry that ascended to heaven was “Oh, God, pardon me !” and covering his face with his hands, he recalled Cecil’s words :

“What would you feel, did you return home and find her dead, and know that you yourself were the cause ?”

He stifled a groan, and looking up, saw Stevens was standing by his side.



“ You may go to her now, Sir, but you must please not to agitate her.”

Stevens spoke in a dictatorial tone, and her face wore an expression as if she despised her master from her very heart.

Lucy was looking anxiously for Robert. When he came in, she smiled faintly, and held out her hand; Robert stooped and kissed her.

“ Oh! darling Lucy,” he murmured, “ how grieved I am.”

She looked so still and death-like, lying back on a pile of white pillows, that Robert could scarcely speak, he was so agitated.

Lucy seemed to read his feelings, for she said.

“ I shall soon be well again, Robert! pray do not be anxious.”

“ We will go home when you are well, darling, directly—home to Forsted and papa and Maude.” Robert knelt on the floor by her bed-side, and she held his hand in both of hers.

“ Delightful! thank you, dear Robert,” she faintly replied.

"You do not suffer now, darling?" Robert said anxiously.

"No, not now you are here," and again she smiled.

There is one verse in the Bible, Robert had never perfectly realized before. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head!" Robert felt the "coals of fire" now—Oh! if she had only upbraided him, he could perhaps have borne it!

"Shall I read you to sleep, Lucy darling, as I used sometimes at home?" Robert asked tenderly.

"If you would be so kind, Robert?" she said, in a contented and peaceful tone.

Robert hesitated a moment what to read. The Bible Lucy loved best; but Padre Anastasio had particularly enforced on him, it was a dangerous book for the laity. He was in a dilemma—when suddenly his eyes lighted on Keble's "Christian Year." He opened the book, and in slightly faltering but soothing tones, he repeated the "Evening Hymn" slowly, sometimes pausing at Lucy's favourite

verses ; and when he had ended, and his voice ceased, the loved eyes that had been fixed watchingly on his face, were closed, and she slept, the cool air from the Campagna blowing fresh over her face through the open window. Robert had forgotten the existence of the physician, till his hand rested on Robert's shoulder, and in a whisper, he said.

“ Take care of her. I will return again at daylight.” Then he moved noiselessly away, and left Robert alone, watching by the bedside of the Squire's idolized child—of Maude's treasured sister, and his own long-trying heretic wife. Did he doubt then that if angels bore her away in her sleep, they would carry her to heaven? Doubt it? oh, no! His mind was racked, tortured, for he thought he should never meet her there! Penances, absolutions, what were they then? Saints and angels, what were they doing that they did not comfort him? All the comfort of the Church had forsaken him, but all the persecutions of his young wife stood out before him in bold relief. Despair and doubt floated around him, and this good son of

the Church found no haven to flee into for safety.

“Amidst the howling wintry sea,  
We are in port if we have Thee!”

In those dreary hours which Robert passed by Lucy's bedside, watching her almost colourless countenance—his old, old, passionate unaffected love returned with all its warmth and tenderness. He wove rapid and eager plans for transporting her home to Forsted; he even revolved in his own mind, the probability of a certain pretty little verandahed cottage being tenantless, where he thought they could live at very little expense. For the journey home he must borrow of Cecil—he would not touch any more of Lucy's legacy—he reddened at the thought; but for Lucy he could do anything. And he would work and pay Cecil again. Oh! what care he would take of her from henceforth! and with what delight he would spare her any trouble, any anxiety! and in order that their income might be larger, he would endeavour, if

possible, to get employment as daily tutor to some of the families in the neighbourhood.

The clock struck eight. Lucy still slept. Robert still formed plans, when the choir of a church near the house, broke forth into melodious strains. The clear, young voices of the choristers rose on the air with touching sweetness. The sound awoke Lucy. She looked around bewildered.

"It was like being aroused by angels," said she with a sweet smile.

"It is the choir, dearest, chanting early service," Robert replied.

"Poor children! they are singing praises as well as they can." She said this in a dreamy voice; then turning to Robert, she exclaimed, "have you been sitting by me all this time. How wearied you must be?" she put out her hand and pushed the hair from off his brow.

"Are you better, darling?" Robert asked.

"Oh, yes! I have been dreaming I was at home; and Maude and I were in the garden with Tawney, and we were both girls again."

“Directly you are well, darling, we will go,” Robert said. “We shall have a very pleasant journey, for Cecil will travel with us.”

“Have you seen him?” Lucy asked.

“I spent some time with him last night. He is as good and true-hearted as ever!”

“Yes! is he not?” responded Lucy.

“I wish I were like him,” sighed Robert. “What a good husband he will make!”

Lucy passed her hand fondly down Robert’s cheek. There was a moment’s silence. Robert felt a choking sensation in his throat, and could not trust himself to speak. Lucy closed her eyes, and seemed as if she would sleep again, when suddenly she said :

“Robert, dear, must you go out to-day?”

The imploring tone struck her husband to the heart, and he burst into tears. Lucy looked pained and distressed, and used all her strength in soothing him, till he sobbed forth :

“Lucy, oh, Lucy! I will never leave you again. I have neglected you cruelly, wickedly, but I will never do so again! I vow it—oh, solemnly! that you shall henceforth be dearer

to me than everything—yes! even dearer than the Church herself!”

“Dearest husband!” Lucy said, “you always have loved me. This last year, we have not been quite so happy together—your new religion stepped between us. But you thought it was all for the best.”

Robert heaved a deep sigh. “Can you forgive me?” he said.

“Indeed I can,” she replied, with a smile. “I should be a strange wife if I could not! Do not look so sad, Robert dear! you have made me very happy: I can lie still and think of home now; and how Maude looks, and papa, and all our old haunts and the familiar faces. I must get well so as to be there for Christmas. I have never once missed ‘Hark the Herald Angels,’ in Forsted church.”

“It shall not be my fault, if you miss it this year,” Robert said.

“It would not appear Christmas unless you went to church with me,” Lucy replied timidly.

“Oh, Lucy! you must not expect too much of me.”

“No—no ! I was wrong, I forgot that our faith is no longer the same,” she said sadly.

“Do you still think mine is not the true one, dearest Lucy ?” Robert asked earnestly.

“Yes, Robert, I know it is not,” she replied.

“What makes you think that ?” he enquired.

“Because the Bible says so,” she answered, in a faint voice—a shade passed over her face, and her eyes closed heavily.

Robert was extremely alarmed, and hastened to find Stevens, upbraiding himself bitterly with having fatigued Lucy ; however, exactly at this moment the physician opportunely entered. Lucy was speedily revived, and Robert made to go and take some rest, the indefatigable Stevens dividing her time between her mistress and little Harry.

About twelve o’clock, Padre Anastasio made his appearance. Little Harry hid himself beneath the sofa. “Is not Mr. Aylmer here ?” the Padre asked of Stevens.

“No, Sir,” was the reply, while she slowly turned the key of a door near her.



“Am I to understand he is not at home?” and the Padre looked searchingly in her face.

“I did not say that, Sir,” she replied, looking uncommonly pert, “but master is asleep, and not to be disturbed on any consideration whatsoever. I had my orders straight from the doctor, Sir.”

The Padre muttered something in Italian between his teeth, and then asked, “Is Mr. Aylmer ill then?”

“No, Sir, but mistress is, and master’s been watching by her all night, and so now the doctor made him leave her to get some rest, because it distresses mistress to see him look so worn out.”

“But I want particularly to see your master. I can wait till he awakes.” The Padre seated himself by the table, and opened a book, it was the “Pilgrim’s Progress,” an illustrated edition, which little Harry had had for his amusement, as the pictures could testify by the numberless little finger marks.

“It is not much use waiting for master, Sir, because now he has once gone to sleep, it’s likely he will sleep a good time.”

“I can wait,” was the terse reply.

Stevens here quietly abstracted the key she had turned, and hurried it into her pocket. It was the key of the room where Robert was sleeping.

“Has Mr. Erresford been here?” asked the priest—here little Harry thought proper to put forth his head and call, “Ugly man—ugly man!” and pursed up his lips in a pout at the Padre, at which that dignitary looked surprised and bestowed on him the epithet of “little demon;” the words, however, being in his own native Italian, failed in effect—and still crying, “Ugly man—ugly man!” the child slipped from his hiding-place, and made for his mother’s room; and before Stevens could stop him, he had bounded in and awoke her from a pleasant sleep, to the unpleasant consciousness that her heart’s dread, the Padre, was in the adjoining apartment. This discovery put her into a trepidation, which was heightened by Harry, who had mounted her pillow calling every moment, “Mamma, ugly man—ugly man there—ugly man, all black; mamma, make him go away!”

“Hush, Harry, hush! that is very naughty,

you must be still," and Lucy strained every nerve to catch the sounds, and to hear if Robert were there ; but the only voices discernible, were the Padre speaking his gruffest, and Stevens her pertest. Lucy was alarmed : she trembled violently, and began to pray that Robert might not be fetched away from her. Presently Robert's voice was added to the others, and a door shook rather violently. Lucy's terror was increased, and scarcely knowing what she did, she got up and began dressing hastily. The clamour in the sitting-room changed into a sudden quietude by the sound of a fall, and a scream from little Harry, who came running in crying, "Mamma's dead ! Mamma's dead."—

In the midst of this confusion, the outer door opened, and Cecil Erresford entered. The bright look on his countenance changed to one of surprise and some alarm at the scene which presented itself to him ; the priest, his eyes flashing with anger, and the tones of his voice indignant. Stevens, her face crimson and tearful, darting across the room, followed by Robert, whose countenance was deadly pale. Little Harry, who had been upset by

Stevens, in her hurry, was screaming lustily. Cecil hastily lifted him up, took him in his arms, and in a few minutes, by the aid of his ticking watch, and a little coaxing, succeeded in quieting the child. Then he turned to the the Padre, who stood muttering to himself in angry tones. "What has happened, Padre?" he asked.

"If I had my way, every heretic should be turned out of Rome!" he exclaimed, without heeding Cecil's enquiry.

"Pray explain what occasions this disturbance?"

"Mamma very ill," put in the child. "Mamma fall down."

"Is Mrs. Aylmer ill?" Cecil asked in a tone of alarm.

"I know nothing of her; but this I know, that you and she will have to answer for the soul of her husband!" and with this outburst the Padre left the room, shutting the door with a thundering sound, which echoed through the house.

At his exit, Stevens returned. "Oh! Sir, oh! Mr. Erresford! if you would go quick, for Dr. Bates—we've killed her between us!

I dare not leave master—he is nearly mad ! Oh ! if we had never set foot in this horrid place !”

“What has happened to your mistress?” Cecil asked of the frightened maid.

“Oh, Sir ! she has fainted dead off again, all through that meddling old priest ! and I, thinking it all for the best—locked master’s door—and the priest—oh ! Sir, he was in a fury ! though I did open it directly master awoke, and shook the lock—oh, we have been the death of her ! she is dead now, I know it !” and Stevens wrung her hands.

Cecil rose up hastily : he felt the floor whirl under his feet—he staggered forward and went out into the street, scarce knowing where he was. Oh ! it must be a delusion that the gentle, loving Lucy, that one being on earth whose goodness was undimmed by the world ; who, only for a few hours ago had planned with him how they should endeavour to rescue her husband from the power of the priests, and induce him to return to England—could it be that she was gone for ever from sight ? Cecil’s heart was full of sorrow—he groaned aloud. “Oh Heavens ! she must

not die—that bright, fair angel thing!” He hurried on. The physician was at home; he knew Cecil well, and was welcoming him gladly, when Cecil explained the purport of his visit.

Dr. Bates rose hastily. “Ah! poor thing,” he said, more to himself than for Cecil’s hearing, “if this continues, I am afraid she cannot last long!”

Cecil trembled. “She is very dear at home,” he said “her father’s heart would be broken—and her husband’s—poor Robert! he lived a happy life, till Mostyn and my sister led him away!”

When they arrived at Aylmer’s rooms, Cecil heard with a feeling of intense relief, that Lucy had recovered from the fainting fit.

“Ah!” said Dr. Bates, “she may revive now, but I cannot answer for her recovering another time!”

There was utter stillness in those rooms the rest of that day: the doctor came in and out almost every hour. He told Robert that unless he wished to kill Lucy, he must exercise command over himself, and act like a rational

being; and he enjoined Stevens to be calm and keep her station, and to let her love for her mistress predominate over every other feeling.

“Will she recover?” Cecil asked, as he carried little Harry away with him to his hotel.

“I cannot tell, God only knows,” was the short reply.

The clock was ticking out the day—the lamp in Lucy’s room gave just sufficient light for Robert to see to read—and what was he reading? A page from that book, which of all others is the fear and dread of every true follower of the faith to which he now belonged. In this book he came upon the very words which had startled Lady Anne: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” They touched Robert’s conscience—he finished the chapter, but still they haunted him—he was silent a moment, when Lucy’s voice asked in feeble accents:

“Are you tired, Robert?”

“Dearest, no! I thought you were asleep.”

“No, dear! I only closed my eyes because

I seem to see angels floating before me when I do so. Read again, dearest."

He read ; but his voice faltered painfully. Some one came softly in, and taking the Bible from him, sat down and repeated, in a deep-toned solemn voice, the parable of the "Prodigal Son." Robert scarcely knew it was Dr. Bates—he fancied it was almost a dream, and he sat with his head bent down on his outstretched hands, the curtain hiding him from Lucy's view. The clocks chimed out the last hour of the Sabbath. Robert started—the Bible and his suffering wife had dealt a severe blow at the foundation of the faith of this weak son of the church.

At the same hour, the Padre Anastasio sat in a gloomy room alone.

"Ha!" he said to himself, "she will soon die, that heretic woman! and then her husband will be freed—he will be ours body and soul. Ha! I will pray for the speedy death of this heretic woman!"



## CHAPTER IX.

Yes ! the unseen land  
Of glorious visions hath sent forth a voice,  
To call me hence. Oh ! be thou not deceived !

MRS. HEMANS.

“ My darling Maude,

“ I am afraid you must have been anxious at not receiving my weekly letter at the usual time ; but the reason is that I have been rather unwell. I had a sudden fainting fit, succeeded by slighter ones, which made me feel weak and good-for-nothing for several days. I am quite bonnie again, however, and as happy as—but I can find no comparison to describe my happiness. You will

want to know what has caused it. Such a reason ! Oh, Maude, we are coming home to dear Forsted ! I can scarcely write this without stopping to clap my hands for joy—it is dear Robert's own proposal, without any asking on my part. Is it not good of him ? and I am sure it will be good for him, as I have not a doubt he will recover his health and spirits, when once we are settled at home again. You will find him sadly altered ! Dear fellow ! he reads the Bible to me every day ! I have great hopes for him, as Popery must fall before the influence of the Bible. I wish every single creature in Rome possessed one ; but, alas ! one dares not distribute them. Mr. Erresford travels home with us. We start on Monday, the day after to-morrow, and expect to be about ten days on our journey. We have no wish to loiter *en route*. But I will write to you again from one of our first stages ; we shall have no trouble, as Mr. Erresford is making every arrangement for us so nicely. I do not think he forgets one comfort for me. Stevens has taken to fits of crying for joy at going home. It is to be

hoped, her friend the bailiff at Preston Hall, has remained faithful to her. She wears that dreadful daguerreotype likeness of him on Sunday in the midst of a profusion of pink ribbons. I believe her John once told her that colour was most becoming to her complexion.

“Father Anastasio does not at all like our move homewards. I really do not think we could get away if it were not for Cecil Erresford. He manages everything wonderfully, even the not to be managed Father! Little Harry has given him the name of “the nice man:” he spoils my boy sadly. There is scarcely a day he does not come to take the child out; and when he returns home, he is always laden with more toys than I shall know where to pack.

“Sad to say, Lady Anne is meditating entering a convent next spring. Her brother says little, but I know he feels deeply. I believe he finds it useless arguing with her.

“What a Christmas we shall have! I know no other word to express it—but Harry’s

new and pet one, which Cecil Erresford has taught him, "Jolly."

"Really Maude, my own old queen, I ought to be twice as thankful as I am. This day last week, home seemed so far off I began to doubt if I should ever see it again. To-day I can praise loudly, for out of what seemed impenetrable darkness light has come. So let us give glory where glory is due—for from heaven and heaven alone cometh every good thing!

"I must conclude this, or my husband, for the first time in his married life will be kept waiting for his dinner. Untold loves to papa and you—Harry's kisses, Robert's love. Another fortnight and I shall throw my arms around my darling father's neck, and kiss you once more in the beloved home, that will see again its and your

"Ever loving

"LUCY."

"P.S. You must not be anxious if you see me looking rather paler and thinner than when

we left, one puff of air from the dear Forsted hills will blow me quite vigorous again !

“ The mountain breezes from my native home,  
My father’s voice, my sister’s loving kiss,  
Ah ! these delights and joys, and these alone,  
Will give me back my childhood’s days of bliss.

“ In that calm, happy spot, my life I’d pass,  
Apart from noise and bustle, din and strife,  
And when old age and death shall come at last,  
I’ll sleep in peace and wake in glorious life.

“ I’ll wake in Heaven, yes, fair sister, there,  
Where angels beauteous walk in streets of gold,  
Where martyrs, prophets, elders, praising share,  
Joys, blessings, pleasures, glories, here untold.”

Such was the letter Lucy Aylmer despatched to Forsted the Saturday after her sudden illness, from which she had recovered with surprising rapidity. Her mind and thoughts were full of home ; every past suffering, every hour of neglect, all were forgotten in the prospect of her return to the Manor. Robert was to become once more a Protestant, and regain his living ; she was to spend a happy and useful life, and her Harry grow up a good

and noble boy, in happy England ! Such were her hopes. Poor Robert was in a state of terror ; he dared not leave the house alone, for fear of encountering Padre Anastasio, whose anger he dreaded from his innermost heart ; and now he had resolved on leaving, he counted the days and almost the hours to his departure. From neglecting his wife, he had gone to the opposite extreme of making an idol of her. He watched her every look, and anticipated her slightest wish. Robert had never prized his Lucy in the palmiest days of their love, more than he did then. The Padre had been refused admittance several times on account of the agitation he had caused Lucy, which had made the doctor pronounce his presence highly injurious to her. Of course the Padre was very much incensed, and sought an opportunity of meeting Robert, but this, Cecil, who used every precaution to prevent the priest regaining his influence over him, entirely frustrated. Nevertheless the Padre yet hoped to get Robert once more within his power—he knew his weak temperament and did not despair ; but now he was disappointed.

“I have written to Maude, Robert dear,” Lucy said as she folded her letter, “and I have told her all about our coming home. Will not papa be glad?”

“To see you, Lucy; but what will he say to me, his truant son-in-law, for all my misdeeds?”

“Hush, Robert! do not become dismal. Papa will be delighted to receive you. He may laugh at us a little at first for our Roman campaign; but every one comes in for a share of papa’s fun. I like it!”

“But will he not upbraid me for your altered looks, Lucy, and justly too?”

“No, he will not, Robert, he will thank you for bringing me to him. Just fancy dear papa welcoming us home with his bright look, and dear queen Maude ready to dart at us and smother us all in her warm embrace!”

“Maude is a good, kind girl,” Robert said, “and your father is sincere in his friendship. But, Lucy, I have abused it sadly I know; and I feel it! yes, Lucy, in spite of Church and priests, I feel I have gone all wrong the last year. Mostyn had no home

ties, I had ; and what Mostyn could do it was not for me to follow."

"Well, never mind, dear, that is all past now, we must look forward, not back ;" she put her head over his shoulder, and surprised and silenced him with a kiss on his anxious, thoughtful brow.

After dinner, Robert entered readily into the packing and arranging books—he would not allow Lucy to assist him in any way, but made her sit on a sofa near him, and talk : of course home was the theme. In the midst of this conversation Cecil came in.

"What, you packing, Aylmer !" he exclaimed. "What a way to do it ! Mrs. Aylmer, why do you not scold him ? He is putting in the smallest books first. Oh, Bob ! such a hand as you always were at domestic occupations ! Now, here am I, a poor, miserable bachelor ; and yet I understand all these concerns, better than you, a veteran in married life !"

Robert and Lucy laughed.

"Now, Aylmer, get out of the way !" added Cecil ; and kneeling himself on the floor, he turned the contents of the box out,



and commenced refilling it in a most precise neat manner. At this moment a door opened, and in bounded Harry, with a little whip in his hand, and climbing on Cecil's back, he called out :

“ Dear man—gee, wo—jolly horse !”

“ Oh, you young rogue !” exclaimed Cecil, “ where did you spring from ?”

“ You have made him the wildest boy imaginable,” said Lucy. “ Poor Stevens declares ‘ Mr. Erresford has raised his spirits to an eminence, from which he overmasters her !’ ”

Cecil laughed.

“ I never saw such an oddity as that Stevens ; her airs and graces are quite entertaining !—Bob, give me that pile of books off the table—oh, you rogue of a fellow—you will pull all the hair out of my head !” and with a sudden turn, Cecil rolled Harry over into the book box. There were shrieks of laughter, then Lucy lifted him out, his curls all tangled together. She could not quiet his excited spirits, nor get him to sit quietly in her lap, until Cecil pulled from his pocket some extraordinary French toy representing two bears,

who danced a polka by means of a string, which delighted the child so intensely, that the sound of his voice was not heard for some minutes. Lucy wanted very much to have a hand in Cecil's task of packing; but he would not hear of it, and made her sit "in state," as he called it, without her work, which was a privation to her industrious little fingers. When the packing was at length successfully finished, Cecil proposed they should take a stroll; but it was becoming dusk, and Robert's dread of encountering the Padre was an obstacle to any pleasure they might derive from the walk; so instead of their ramble, Cecil spent the evening with them, and made them merry by his animated conversation, and Robert declared he "felt quite young again." At this speech, Lucy was greatly entertained. Good little wife! she did her part in the evening's amusement, by singing without accompaniment sundry old songs so pathetically, that Robert could not restrain his tears, and Cecil had recourse to various little manœuvres to conceal his emotion. The last song was "The Land of the Leal;" at its conclusion, Cecil rose, and sighed.

“What is the matter?” Lucy asked.

“You are a very naughty little woman to sing such melancholy songs,” he replied. “Poor John! one pities him from the heart. But I must run away, now. I know you are early folks.”

“Will you come to-morrow morning, and take Lucy to church?” Robert asked.

“To be sure I will.” Then turning rather slyly towards Robert, he said, “If the wife goes, will not the husband come too?”

Robert coloured deeply.

“Not here,” he said. “Wait till we are in England again. I may be persuaded to many things when I am there.”

“Oh! come to-morrow, Robert,” Lucy said pleadingly, as she laid her hand on his arm.

“Lucy dear, you forget I am a Catholic,” he replied, as he gently stroked her hand.

“Yes I do. I forget everything but the delight it would be to have you once more with me in church.” She looked so sweetly in his face, that Cecil thought Robert must acquiesce.

“Catholic though I am, I will promise you

to go to church the next Sunday, if you will only excuse me this. I could not, Lucy, indeed, enter the church here."

"Oh! Aylmer, go!" Cecil said. "The prayers will not hurt you, or the sermon; and where Mrs. Aylmer sits, you would never be noticed. It is such a quiet corner."

"To-morrow week must do," Robert replied, looking very uncomfortable.

Lucy did not ask again, but said in her sweet, gentle tones:

"I shall count the days till next Sunday."

"Oh! Bob, believe me, the best time for everything is now," urged Cecil.

"Never mind," said Lucy, "We must not tease poor Robert."

"Oh! it does him good to be teased sometimes," replied Cecil, archly.

"But, Mr. Erresford, Robert might as well ask us to attend his service with him."

"I should not mind it," replied Cecil. "Should you?"

"No, it could not do me any harm," said Lucy.

"Done then!" exclaimed Cecil. "Bob, we will come to terms. You shall accompany

us in the morning, and we will go with you in the afternoon. That is quite fair."

"You are as much a school-boy as you were sixteen years ago, Erresford," replied Robert.

"No evasions, Bob—you will agree, will you not? Nothing is easier."

"For me nothing could be more difficult," Robert answered. "Erresford, say no more; it is impossible. In England, you will not ask in vain. I will please you then, even against my conscience. But here, in the face of the Church, the thing cannot be."

A slight shade of disappointment rested for a moment on Lucy's fair face, but only for a moment, the next, it was dissipated by a smile; and she said:

"Never mind, Robert dear! we were rather hard upon you."

"Then to-morrow at a quarter to eleven."

"I know you are punctuality itself," said Cecil. "Adieu, ladye fayre—adieu, sister Lucy."

"Adieu, brother Cecil. *Vous êtes toujours gai,*" she smilingly replied.

"I am wearing off the effects of the 'Land

o' the Leal.' I know I shall dream to-night I am 'John.'"

"What an idea!" said Robert.

"Upon my word, I must go. I have kept sister Lucy standing at least ten minutes." He shook hands with Lucy, turned back, and nodded to her. And then Robert accompanied him down-stairs.

Cecil did not dream of "the Land o' the Leal;" but Robert did; and the dream made a great impression upon him. As Lucy was making breakfast on the Sunday morning, after some silence Robert said:

"It is a beautifully bright morning, Lucy."

"It is, indeed," she replied, looking from the window. "It is more like an August morning than the last Sunday in November. Just observe the sky!"

"Yes, very clear and bright. Lucy! I shall go to church with you." This was said rather suddenly.

"Oh! dear Robert, thank you!" Lucy exclaimed, while a brilliant colour lighted up her whole countenance, then vanished, leaving it paler than before.

“Yes, I shall like it,” he said. Then presently, he added: “I dreamt about you and your last song, Lucy—such a strange dream!”

“Did you?” she replied smiling. “It was very natural after all Cecil Erresford said about it.”

“Do you think so?” Robert asked. He did not tell Lucy he dreamt she had died in the midst of singing that song! This dream so haunted him, that he could not bear to leave her, and that was the cause of his sudden determination to accompany her to church.

“I can fancy how joyful papa and Maude will be when they receive my letter,” Lucy said. “The Forsted bells will be sure to ring when we arrive at home.”

Robert smiled, but the smile disappeared in a sigh.

“I think papa will find Harry very much improved, do you not, Robert?” Lucy asked.

“Yes, he is a handsome little fellow, wonderfully like your family.”

“Oh! he is only like papa and Maude.

Beautiful Maude, I wonder if she will ever marry?"

"Lucy, can you ever doubt it? Perhaps, she has set her face against matrimony, seeing the wretched husband I have made."

"Silly Robert! I am sure when Maude spent any time at the Parsonage, she must have longed for just such a home and husband as mine!" Lucy rose from the table and patted his shoulder lovingly, then looking at her watch she said: "We are late this morning."

"No, I do not think so, Lucy," and Robert wheeling back his chair sat thoughtfully and silent.

Lucy took up her Bible, and read till a bell chimed half-past ten.

Precisely at the time appointed, Cecil made his appearance. Lucy had resumed her seat and her Bible, and was reading alone—she looked very sweet and pretty, dressed with more than usual care in a dress and cloak of dark blue, with handsome chinchilla furs, a gift of the Countess. Her bonnet was the only shabby part of her toilette—economy for



Robert had prevented her purchasing a new one, but she had tied a white veil over it, and the folds of lace hanging around her face, gave a pretty shade, and concealed any imperfections in her bonnet. When Cecil entered, she greeted him with a joyous smile.

“He is coming!” were her first words.

“Who, Harry?” asked Cecil.

“No, no, Robert! Oh, dear, how happy I am!” She said these last words with a sort of childlike sigh of overflowing joy.

“Ah! poor old Robert! he will come round yet, and make as good a Protestant as any of us!” Cecil said with a bright look, which showed how he entered into her pleasure.

“You have always been so kind to Robert, and never despaired about him,” said Lucy.

“Poor fellow! no, why should I? Besides a little consideration and interest do more for a man than shunning and upbraiding him.”

“I wish every one would think so,” Lucy began; but she ceased, for Robert came in. Lucy felt proud of him—it seemed to her like

Forsted not Rome, and she could have fancied their steps were wending to old St. Walburga, not to the English Consulate Church, as after bidding good-bye to little Harry, she took Robert's arm, and walked along the dirty looking streets. Robert might have passed for an English clergyman again in his black dress. Ah ! how Lucy wished he had been going to officiate !

“ But, hush, impatient Lucy !” she said to herself. “ That will all come again in God's good time !” Cecil talked little *en route*—he liked to listen to his companions. Lucy tried to fill Robert's mind with pleasant thoughts. The walk to church was not long ; and when there, Lucy gave up her quiet corner to Robert, that he might feel secluded and unnoticed ; and yet she almost longed he should be seen, that people might know he was not shunning the worship of his fathers. The kind physician, who had attended Lucy, saw him, and felt very glad ; but by most he was unobserved. Gently Lucy placed an open prayer-book before Robert, and whispered low :

“ Robert, I am so happy !” Silently he

pressed her hand—then the service began. Slowly and feelingly it was read—it thrilled through Robert's heart. Had it ever sounded to him as it did that day? Did not every one of those prayers, every word of the service he had so often read reverently but heartlessly, now rise up in judgment against him for his apostacy? Did not every word of it contradict Popery, and the forms and ceremonies to which he had bowed down? Ah! it seemed so to him! His head was bent low; he trembled—the glare and glitter of Popery, with its arts and wiles, passed from before his eyes, and left him, as it were, on the sands—the ocean of life, with its ceaseless roar, rushed upon him, and he knew not how to flee! At length, the hymn before the sermon came—it was Advent Sunday, Lucy's voice rose with joy in the beautiful Advent hymn. Cecil listened, and Robert's voice, so silent during the responses, softly mingled with his Lucy's. Then Cecil sang too and rejoiced! It was over, and Robert harkened to the words of the text: it was taken from the first chapter of the Revelations, and part of the seventh

verse, "Behold he cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him."

"It is a glad and joyful day," these were the opening words of the sermon. "Yes," thought Lucy, "yes, 'tis true !" She rested her hand in Robert's, and left it there.

Then the clergyman spoke of Christ's Advent, its glories, of those who will share the glories, and of those who will feel it terrible ; then of the heavenly train who will attend the Saviour at His second coming—saints, angels, prophets, martyrs. On the last word, he paused, and dwelt on those who shall come out of tribulation—not those who had suffered great tribulations only, but those who endure silently lesser tribulations, unknown to the world. Suddenly he said :

"There may be some here who have suffered these latter tribulations patiently and enduringly. This may be your day of relief ; it may be that your tribulation is removed, and brighter, happier days on earth are in store, which dawn upon you now ; or it may be, your Father will send an angel to bring you up to Him—your trials unaltered, un-

soothed, left behind ; and at Heaven's gate, for your cross you will receive a crown—for days of suffering you will inherit a life of glory !”

The whole sermon Lucy heard with intense interest, and it concluded with six lines from her favourite poet, George Herbert :

“Awake ! sad heart, whom sorrow ever drowns ;  
Take up thine eyes which feed on earth ;  
Unfold thy forehead, gathered into frowns ;  
The Saviour comes, and with him mirth.

Awake ! awake !

And with a thankful heart thy comfort take.”

The Service was ended. Robert had heard every word of it. He felt strangely altered from what he had been ! They rose and left the church immediately to avoid meeting the congregation. The sun shone brightly ; the air was balmy, almost hot. Lucy said :

“I wonder if it is like this at home, or if the valley is filled with a November fog ?”

“We shall soon see for ourselves how home looks,” Cecil replied. Then after a pause

he added, "That was a splendid sermon, Aylmer."

"Yes," was the monosyllabic answer.

"That man knows what he is about," said Cecil, addressing Robert again.

"Yes! I wish I had heard him before," was the reply.

Cecil looked at Lucy. Her face was very pale.

"You are tired, Mrs. Aylmer?"

"Not very. I have dressed rather too heavily for the day."

"Let me carry those furs for you," said Cecil, taking her muff and boa into his possession; while Robert looked anxious, and asked:

"Dear, you are not ill?"

"No, Robert, dearest! nor thinking of such a thing. You must remember it is my first day of going out, and I noticed several people besides myself seemed to feel the air oppressive."

"You look so pale!" Robert said.

"Would you like a carriage?" Cecil asked, becoming rather anxious in his turn.

“Thank you—indeed no ; you must not make such a fuss about me !” Lucy said, smiling. “You must often expect to see me pale when I am tired. Besides, I never am very rosy.”

“You are getting all right now. Upon my word, you frightened me !” Cecil said. “Robert was quite pale himself, from sympathy.”

They walked quietly on, speaking a little of their intended journey, much of the sermon, Robert rather listening than joining in the conversation. When they reached the entrance of the Aylmer’s dwelling, Lucy said :

“You must come in, Mr. Erresford, and dine with us.”

“I would gladly if I could, but I stumbled on an old bachelor acquaintance yesterday, who asked me to meet him to-day to dine together. I intend trying to get him to church this afternoon. I only hope we may hear as good a sermon as we did this morning. My acquaintance is not a Roman Catholic, Aylmer, but an Unitarian. I like to do

good to my friends if I can on Sunday, and this day is so warmly bright, that I feel as if my heart could call every man, woman, and child in this city brother and sister, and wish I could benefit every one of them !”

“ I would gladly help you,” Lucy said.

“ Ah, well ! we must do good where we can, and for the rest, the same Providence watches over, and the same heaven is ready to receive all who look up to it !” he looked up too, the sky was so cloudless—“ good-bye, Mrs. Aylmer !”

“ I wish Erresford, you and my wife would call each other by your baptismal names, it will strengthen our friendship.”

“ Readily !” exclaimed Cecil, “ but I shall not say good-bye, only *au revoir*, Lucy, till five o’clock to-morrow morning, the happy twenty-ninth ! We have made one step homewards by that packing yesterday ; to-morrow we march in good earnest. *Au revoir*, Aylmer, *au revoir*, Lucy !”

“ *Au revoir* ! Cecil. I feel exactly as if I should be really home to-morrow, only in



anticipation of the starting—*au revoir !*” were Lucy’s last words, as they disappeared through the dark archway.

Cecil saw their shadows depart, then exclaimed : “ Thank God they are re-united ! ” he went on to finish the day as he had commenced it, in friendship and good works.

Lucy paused one moment to speak a few kind, simple words to old Pietro the landlord, who generally opened his door to see her pass, and whose tears flowed at the near prospect of beholding her no more. When Lucy reached their *étage*, she was really tired, but she did not complain—Robert only saw her joy. Harry dined with them ; Stevens waited on them, and there was not one cloud in that dismantled, dismal-looking room, from which every ornament but Lucy’s presence was taken. They were to start so early on the morrow, that every possible package had been got ready on the preceding day. Stevens, as usual, went to church in the afternoon, and obtained permission from Lucy to take Harry with her, and to pay a farewell visit after service to a friend who had arrived in

Rome a few weeks previously, as maid to an English family come to winter there.

After Stevens was gone, Lucy rested against the window : it was open, and a breeze came in balmy and warm. She leant her head on her hand, and looked up at the sky and sunshine. Robert had been watching her with an anxious expression on his countenance. He came up, and putting his arm round Lucy's waist, said :

"Do you feel ill, Lucy? Your lips are pale, and you tremble."

"I feel rather faint," was the reply.

Robert's countenance expressed fear and trouble. "Lie down, my Lucy," he said, "the walk to church has been too much for you;" he guided her to the sofa, and gently placed her there, then fetching pillows from an adjoining room, piled them beneath her head.

"Thank you, dear, that is better," she said faintly.

Robert brought her salts-bottle and some cold water, but they did not seem to revive her very much. Her husband's forehead wore

marks of sorrow, his lips quivered, "Is this like you felt before?" he asked.

"No, not so bad," she replied faintly.

"I shall send Pietro for Dr. Bates," Robert said nervously; "my darling, I shall only leave you one moment."

He hastily descended the stairs and despatched the grieved old landlord for the physician with the message that the Signora was ill again.

Robert hurried back to Lucy, and kneeling by her side, supported her head on his arm. He was much more calm than he had been before, and acted quietly and without agitating her. There were some restorative medicines in Lucy's room that she had used before; Robert tried these, but they failed to rouse her from what seemed stupor.

"Lucy, darling, what do you feel?" he asked.

"It feels like death," she replied, in a scarcely audible voice, "but I am not afraid."

Robert's face was almost convulsed with agony; and large drops stood on his brow, as he bent over Lucy and bathed her forehead and lips with water. She shivered and heaved

a deep sigh. "Are you cold, dearest?" he asked. She made no reply—he brought a coverlid and laid it over her, and placed a cloak across her feet, they were icy cold. As if with a great effort she said, "Thank you dear, it is very sudden—hold my hand"—he took her hand in his, that precious little hand! which had rested so often confidently in his, and on whose finger such a short time back, it seemed to him now as yesterday, he had placed the ring that glittered there, the seal of her much abused love! She lay quite still, her eyes closed, her soft shining braids parted over her calm face—it was childlike, innocent, fair as on their wedding-morn—sorrow had been there, but it had left no trace behind—sorrow had been there? Ah yes! as her husband watched by her, that knowledge pierced his wounded heart—sorrow had been there! oh, who had caused it? His own conscience answered, "Thou art the man!" The lines on his forehead deepened; he pressed his hands on it to force back the agony, but it would not go; it tarried there to torture him! It brought before his mind the days when he had guided her infant steps along the lawn,

and wove daisies into garlands to hang around her neck. It showed as though it were a thing of yesterday, the scenes of their gambols and merry games—the old fireside chair, where Lucy had sat on his knee and listened to tales of his school life—it took him on to his college days, sweetened by vacation trips to the Manor, where no voice gave gentler welcome, or more loving words than his little Lucy. It reminded him of his ordination vows—all broken and forgotten. It dwelt on his matured love, his winning the fair Lucy—the joy, the delight, the cloudless morn when vow was given for vow—her's alone remaining unbroken. It showed him happy pastoral life, all glowing with her love ; it forced upon him his apostacy, his desertion ; and to complete all, to heighten his agony, it pictured her grief, her devotion, the little grave beneath the roses—their reunion, the many opportunities given him for repentance—the daily sorrow of her life—the wreck of her health. It showed him death, a grave in a foreign land, a white grave stone, on which that much abused name, “ Lucy,” was traced in deep dark

letters. It left him there holding still that little hand, looking still on that loving brow, so pale, so cloudless, he scarcely knew if the angel of death were there, or if life and hope yet lingered. The sun was setting, it lighted up her couch with its rays of crimson and gold, o'ershadowing her face with its glory. Her eyes slowly opened, she said, "It is beautiful going home."

Her husband bent his head to catch her words, "Darling!" she continued, in a caressing voice, "darling, I must leave you. Let me rest by our baby's grave—take care of Harry, and meet me again!"

"Sweetest!" he said, in a low, hoarse voice, "you are too young to die."

She did not heed him. "Kiss them all, and tell them gently," she murmured in a dreamy tone—she was silent some moments, then opening her eyes and resting them on him with a smile, she said in a tone of unspeakable love "Dear, darling!"

As Robert stooped to kiss her, he whispered, "Forgive me—my angel!"

"He will," she replied, "he forgives all!"

she closed her eyes again with the prayer,  
“ guard and love my darling husband ! ”

The dusk of evening gathered. The moments seemed to Robert to fly fast ; he had forgotten the Doctor ; no thought was present to him but his Lucy. Again he parted the hair from her brow, and kissed her lips. She moved ; withdrew her hand from his and placed it beneath her head. “ It is very peaceful, sweet ; read me to sleep. ” A moment after, she murmured “ The Lord is my Shepherd ! ” Robert thought she wished the Psalm repeated, and bending over her, he began it in a low voice. She smiled sweetly, “ I shall take that with me, Robert darling, the ‘ prayer for the dying ! ’ ”

Her prayer book lay on a table near ; and kneeling by her couch, he, who a few short months ago, had deserted her to enter the Romish priesthood, now read once again prayers from the church he had forsaken, over the form of his meek and gentle wife ! It was dark, he had ceased to read, and sat still and almost breathless by her side. The door opened noiselessly ; he heard it not, his every nerve was strained in thought for his Lucy,

and when the doctor groped his way through the room faintly lighted by the moonbeams, and stood by her couch, with the whispered words "a pressing case detained me," Robert's scarcely audible voice replied—"Hush, she sleeps!"



## CHAPTER X.

Ah, pity! The lily is withered, the purple of the violet turned into paleness.

JEREMY TAYLOR.

Snow flakes gathered around the Manor. The old hall fire was lighted again ; there were bright laurels around the pictures, and the stags' heads were wreathed with holly. It was the month of December, when Maude Neville entered a low, thatched cottage in the village. An old man rose from his seat in the chimney-corner, and leaning on his stick, said " A good day to ye, Miss Maude."

" Sit down, Robbins, or I will not stay," she replied ; " how is your rheumatism ?"

" Oh, Miss Maude, it be gone ! I've walked as far as Farmer Perkins' this ere morning, to

beg a bit of holly to smarten my old place against Miss Lucy and the Parson comes. Ye see, Miss Maude, the saucepans are quite festival-like."

"Yes! you have made them look very smart. Lucy will be sure to pay you a visit soon after she arrives at home."

"Miss Maude, I be so grieved for her poor old dog."

"Yes," said Maude, with a momentary shade on her brow, "I wish poor old Tawney had lived to welcome her home. Papa and I buried him under the great cedar by Lucy's garden, and have piled a pointed heap of flints to mark his grave."

The old man brushed his rough hand over his eyes. "My poor old 'oman used to set such store by the dog, when Miss Lucy brought him down to our little place; but of all them there, Miss Lucy be the only one left. Well, the old uns go first! my old 'oman would ha' been seventy-five year come next Branstone fair, if she'd been spared a little longer! and it's twelve year ago this Christmas since I went to Preston Hall, and brought the Squire home that 'ere dog!"

Maude, during the old man's speech, was busy pulling something from her pocket, which being rather larger than the pocket itself, was somewhat difficult to get out. At last, however, a rather strange-looking parcel made its appearance. Maude laughed to herself as going up to the old man, who was rather deaf, she said, "Robbins, what do you think I have brought you in my pocket?"

"Lor, Miss, something nice—I'll be bound!"

"Oh! it is something very queer for a pocket," said Maude.

"Lor, Miss Maude, I've knowed you and Miss Lucy fill your little pockets afore this with all manners o' things! There was little clay baskets, and stones and baked taters—bless your hearts!—and there was turnips for my old 'oman!"

"Well, I have brought you a tongue, a home-cured tongue; and Ralph is to bring you a piece of veal. Papa wants every one to be merry when Lucy returns—so papa is to send you something warm with the veal, to help you drink Lucy's health."

"Bless the Squire and Miss Lucy and

Miss Maude and all!" said the old man nearly crying. "I only wish my old hands was stronger, that I could help them ringers, and give the first peal for Miss Lucy! Bless her dear heart! I could kiss the ground on which I see her stand!"

"That would be doing rather too much, Robbins," said Maude laughing. "I will let you know the very minute Lucy arrives. Ralph shall come down with the cart and bring you up, and then you will get a first sight of her—good-by! Now do not get up, I know the latch." And Maude went out again into the snowy little village, followed by the blessings of the superannuated gardener.

It was a foggy-looking morning, and the snow-covered gardens and pasture-lands wore a desolate appearance. But Maude's heart was glad, for soon she would hold in her embrace her loved sister, the companion of her childhood's days. She went from cottage to cottage proclaiming the news; and from every mouth was the glad tidings echoed that "our parson and Miss Lucy were coming home!" and in the excess of their

delight did a few of the most high-spirited forego their dinner hour, and send forth a merry peal from St. Walburga's old snowy tower, in anticipation of their return.

It was not till nearly three o'clock that Maude went home, humming as she walked the solitary road, "Sweet Lucy Neal." She shut the gate with a swing, and made a short cut over the snowy lawn towards the house. Some of her father's sporting dogs which were near the door, came running up to her, and rubbed their noses against her hands.

"Well, old fellows," she said, caressing them, "why is it you are not out with your master? Eh, old doggies?"

The dogs looked up inquisitively at her with their soft deep eyes, and followed her closely to the hall door, where she shut them all out. The fire burned low and Maude put a log on it from the wood box. Then throwing her muff on the table, she went into the dining-room, where dinner was laid for two.

"Is papa at home, Morris?" Maude asked in some surprise; "I thought he was going

over to Preston Hall with the dogs. I should have been in before, if I had known he would remain at home."

"Master is in the library, Miss. A letter came directly after you went, and master took it in there, and has not stirred since."

Maude looked alarmed. "There is no fire in the library, and papa never sits there—I shall go and see. You can bring in the dinner, I am very hungry."

Maude's thick boots sounded on the oak floor, as she crossed the hall, and opened the library door.

She started when she saw her father seated in an old arm-chair before the table on which his arms were crossed and his head rested down on them. His back was towards Maude, he did not see her enter. She stood still a moment, then going up to his chair, she threw her arms over his shoulders, and rested her cheek on his head.

The Squire moved back suddenly, and drawing her close to him exclaimed, in a voice of hopeless misery: "Maude, my *only* child!"

Maude's eyes looked down on the open

letter lying on the table blistered with tears. A black border surrounded it. The truth flashed on her in a moment, and like a whirlwind it swept her bright hopes away.

“She is dead!” Maude shrieked; and her voice echoed through the lone old mansion, as she rushed from that cold, dreary room. The wind blew against her face. She hurried out through the garden door, up the shrubberied walk, where she and Lucy had been wont to stroll, arm linked in arm. Then, on a rustic seat, all crisp with snow, beneath the shade of the great cedar-tree, she threw herself down and covered her face with her hands, rocking to and fro to the dreary accompaniment of the sighing wind. “She is gone!—she is gone! oh! Lucy!” were the words her lips uttered, mingled with an unsuppressed cry, “Oh! cruel, cruel! to take her from us!” She sat there a long time thus bewailing, until the sound of a footstep awoke her for a moment from her misery. She looked up hastily. She was too much absorbed in her own sorrow to feel any surprise when she saw Cecil Erresford close by her side.

“Maude!” he said, in a pitying, gentle

voice, "they told me you had gone away up the shrubberies; and I came to seek you."

"Oh! leave me—leave me!" she exclaimed. "Just as my happiness seemed so complete! Oh! it was a cruel Providence which took my Lucy from me."

"Hush, Maude!" he said, softly. "She was wanted in Heaven. You would not wish her back again?"

"You cannot comfort me. Oh, no! you can know nothing of what I feel. You never loved her, idolized her as I have done!"

"Maude," he replied, gravely, "I did love her truly once, with intense love," he lifted, as he spoke, his hat from his head. "But it is past now," he added. "All human love is needless. She rests in Heaven; and could she speak to us from her bright home, she would teach us patience and resignation."

"I cannot learn them," Maude passionately exclaimed; "for me these words do not exist! Oh! why did Robert go to a foreign land, and kill her there?"

Again were Cecil's words:

"Hush, Maude! Robert's grief is far greater than ours. Upbraid him not. It



was Heaven's good time—no act of Robert's sent her to her grave."

"A grave in a foreign, hateful land!" exclaimed Maude bitterly. "No one will plant roses there, or weep over the loved one that rests beneath the sod!" The echo from the hills sent back Maude's wild cry.

"Maude, our sister sleeps in no lonely grave. Her mortal rest will be beneath the shadows of her native hills! It was her dying request to lie beside her infant's grave."

Then tears rolled down Maude's proud face. She looked up, and, in a softened tone said:

"Tell me of her—did you see her die?"

"When last I saw her, it was on the Sabbath morn. Her face was cloudless, and death seemed far away. I stood once again beside her coffin, and kissed our sister's cold brow. But it was not our Lucy; she was far away where 'Angels sweet a careful watching o'er our sister keep.'"

Maude rose and drew her veil over her tearful face.

"Come," she said, "walk with me, and tell me all you know."

"She had been ill—very ill!" he replied;

“so that for one night her life was in danger. She would not let you know; ’twould marr your happiness, she said; and it was quickly passed; but still her physician feared. He told us he dreaded a disease of the heart, and said afterwards that he expected any day she might be taken from us.”

“What caused it?” exclaimed Maude bitterly. “Who caused it? Mr. Erresford, you cannot deny he caused it. Her own husband — for whom she sacrificed everything—he broke her heart!”

“There is no doubt,” Cecil said gravely, “that sorrow and neglect brought on the disease; and a life-time will never erase the terrible thought from Robert’s mind. Maude, when you see him, your anger will vanish, and pity will occupy its place in your heart.”

“I will never pity him!” she exclaimed. “Had he no will? Was he a madman that he must rush blindly on till he caused her death? No! it was voluntary. I pity my father, myself, our angel; but for Robert I have no pity.”

“Then, Maude, you do not resemble her, our sister, who pitied every one, even the very priest who led her husband away.”

Maude was silent. Her tears flowed fast beneath the dark folds of her veil.

Cecil led her along through the deserted, snowy walks, across the valley which lay at the foot of Castle St. Agnes.

"Unless we copy her holy life, we can never meet her again," Cecil said slowly.

"Did she leave no message—no last word for me?" Maude said, in a voice of agony.

"I know not," he replied; "her husband could not speak of her—he may to you. I went to him on the Monday morning. She was gone! He had spoken to no one since the Sunday afternoon, when she fainted and died; and when Dr. Bates came to her, Robert sat by her side, and only thought she slept! Our journey was postponed two days. Robert passed them alone; he saw no one but her child."

Maude sobbed aloud.

"Shall I take you to her motherless boy?" Cecil asked.

"Yes, let me have him—oh! give him to me!" she cried.

Cecil led her on, through a little snow-

track which skirted the park and a part of the woods. Gently he handled her grief; his own was deep. "Our sister—our Lucy!" How tenderly the words sounded from his lips! They soothed Maude as he told how happy she had been in the thoughts of home—how good and patient in her sorrow, and how ardently she loved Robert! and how, the last week of her life, Robert had repented, and loved her with more than his former affection.

"You must love Robert for her sake," Cecil said.

They were beneath the shade of the Castle now; the snow rested on its projecting mullions and cornices, and the closed shutters made Maude shudder. The air sighed heavily from the north over the whitened plains and drifting hill-sides. One single black crow winged its way along beneath the grey clouds. An awful stillness reigned, except when a hound in the kennel sent forth a deep-toned howl. Evening's winter shades fell everywhere, over tree and shrub, over wall and turret—shades within and shades without.

By an impulse, Maude laid her hand on Cecil's arm.

"Is she here?" she asked, in low tones.

"Yes, Maude!" he replied.

His hand was on the door; he opened it, and stood once more in the old ancestral hall. The knights in armour looked grim and stiff against the walls. Cecil led her away. No parade of servants disturbed and witnessed her grief—they were alone. He took her down a silent gallery. She heard a child's blithe voice in this dreary house of death; and on her listening ear, from St Walburga's tower, where so lately joy-peals had echoed and mocked the gloomy air, now were wafted the sounds of the muffled bell.

It was all to Maude as "a dream remembered in a dream;" she almost doubted if she were awake. Suddenly a bright, laughing boy bounded up the passage, and threw his arms round Cecil's knees. It was her child—Lucy's own Harry! Maude stopped, took him from Cecil, and clasped him in her arms. The child looked frightened at Maude's sad, tearful face, and struggled to get free

from her embrace, and flew to Cecil again. Cecil carried him down the passage; Maude followed. Then he opened a door. A fire burnt there; a figure bent over it, and read by its flickering light. There were long shadows on the floor, and the engravings on the walls looked dull and gloomy. Maude drew back a step, while little Harry subdued his childish mirth, and whispered :

“Poor papa !”

“Speak to him,” Cecil said; “he will tell you of her.”

Still Maude hesitated, when Cecil added :

“*She* would have comforted him.”

Maude slowly advanced on the threshold. Cecil gently closed the door; little Harry’s voice died away in the passage; and Maude stood alone with the husband—the destroyer, as she thought—of her dead sister! She did not speak. He moved not, or looked up. She saw he read by the firelight, and she thought the book was a Bible. She stood a moment irresolute whether to speak or to go away: her good, noble nature triumphed. She would supply Lucy’s place—Maude would be his comforter! The task was a

hard one to her proud spirit, for ever the words were ringing in her ears, “ ’Twas he who killed her—he broke her heart !”

“ Robert !” Maude said, her own voice terrified her, the walls seemed to echo back the word.

He started, and bent his head down on his hands.

Maude threw aside her bonnet and cloak, and stood on the hearth-rug before him, her beautiful face wild in its sorrow.

“ Speak to me, Robert,” she cried, “ I am come, as *she* would have come, to be a comforter to you in this day of our bitter sorrow—speak to me, Robert ; tell me, did she leave any message for me, not even one parting word ? my darling, my dear sister !”

“ Forgive me, Maude, forgive me, as she forgave me !” Robert exclaimed, as he sank on the floor at her feet, and knelt there.

“ Rise, Robert, rise !” she replied. “ I do forgive you ; even though she is dead, and I shall never see her more ! Rise, Robert, I command you ! Oh, I never dreamt to see this dreadful day !”

He did rise slowly, then said :

“Her end was peace—she slept and woke in Heaven ! I have been a great sinner ; but I hope to follow her there !”

“Tell me, Robert,” Maude exclaimed, as she forced him to resume his seat, and stood before him, “tell me, are you still a follower of the Romish religion ?”

“The day she died, it died to me,” he replied, in a hollow voice. “I have come back, Maude, to her church again. She and the Bible brought me there !”

“Poor Robert !” Maude said, it was all the comfort she had to offer. She sat down on a low seat opposite him in the dim light, and listened as he spoke to her of Lucy, and told her treasured words—her holy deeds, her love for him—for all.

The lamps shone in the long gallery when Robert’s cold hand was placed in Maude’s, and he led her away to a dark, pannelled room : a light burnt faintly there, a figure leant against a high raised drapery of pure white. It was the Squire, who wept beside his Lucy’s coffin ! Robert stood still, Maude felt him tremble ; she kept his hand, and brought him side by side with her father.



“Papa,” she said, in a choked voice, “Lucy forgave him !” She joined their hands together.

The Squire’s tones were stifled ; but it was the Squire’s own good heart which burst forth.

“Bob, I forgive you ! it is no place for anger here. My poor little flower—she is gone from me ; but she is better off ! They called her an angel. I never thought how soon she was to be one—my poor, bright, faded flower !” The Squire laid his head on that white pall and wept.

There was a solemn silence, only the wind in the corridors spoke in dreary accents of death. Suddenly Robert said :

“We may not pray for her—there is no prayer where my Lucy dwells, but for ourselves—oh, shall we not pray ?”

Maude knelt as he knelt ; the Squire stood with bowed head ; then the desolate husband from his soul prayed :

“Oh, Lord ! make us like her, that we may follow her to glory !”

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Forsted's hills and dales were clad in one universal robe of white. The hedges wore festoons of snow, and the ivy on old St. Walburga's tower drooped in white festoons; and over all, the sun shone just twelve days before Christmas.

It was Sunday. The morning service was ended, and the winter's sun was beginning to decline, when forth from the churchyard gates the Vicar of Branstone came white-robed to meet the funeral of Forsted's fair, stricken flower; the slow, measured footfall blended with the sighing of the yew, and the tones of the muffled bell.

The Squire's comrades in the chase, bore his young daughter to her earthly rest. Her own kindred all were there; even the stern Lord Sangford could not withhold the silent tribute of a tear. His drooping wife, his gay sister, all were there—a long train of village maidens, tiny children, and sunburnt veterans. The same crowd who saw her wedding, stood among the snow-covered graves, and wept at her funeral; the bridegroom, the bride-maidens, father, sister, Cecil—all were there—the bride alone was not; for her spirit had

been called to a heavenly marriage feast, and the gentle form all had that day delighted to gaze upon, was laid to rest by the side of her little one gone before. The church in which she had loved to worship, threw its shade over her, and her rest was very peaceful.

The solemn service was read, and the sorrowing train dispersed. The Castle, the Manor, the cottage—all received mourners into their shelter; and little groups stood around the new made grave, and spoke of her virtues and her end. Then the sun set, and the moon rose and shone in silvery whiteness over wood and glade—and its beams rested tenderly on Lucy Aylmer's grave.

## CHAPTER XI.

Her memory long will live alone,  
In all our hearts as mournful light,  
That broods above the fallen sun,  
And dwells in heaven half the night.

TENNYSON.

WHEN the dreary winter had passed, and harsh winds swept the snow flakes from the hill-side, Robert Aylmer and his child were far separated. The vicar of Forsted was suspended for two years ; at the expiration of this period, his unchanging patron promised his return to his former living. Till then, Cecil pressed on him a home at Hatchworth, his country seat. This offer Robert gravely but thankfully refused : he would no longer eat the bread of idleness—his resolve was taken, it

was a high one—he would begin a new existence, a working life, and go forth to meet the future with a manly heart! with the memory of the warning past ever before him, He kissed his motherless child, confided him to Maude's love; then went to his self-appointed duty. On the lonely heights of Northern Scotland, armed with his Bible, and the shadow of her love still clinging to him, the repentant Robert performed the task of tutor to the spoilt and petted son and heir of the fretful Lady Damer. It was no light toil, but even as he had been borne with, so now he bore with others, and in his life he strove to copy hers, and practice patience and resignation. Each week he sent letters to Maude, and in these letters oftentimes came wild mountain flowers, or little pictures for his child.

How Maude loved and idolized the noble little fellow, and how the Squire made him the delight of his heart, only themselves knew. Lucy's boy was all in all to them!

The poor Squire seemed to be getting into greater difficulties about this time. The heavy mortgage annually paid to his brother upon the estate dipped deeply into his already

reduced income. One morning when Maude asked him for the usual weekly sum for her household expenses, the Squire made no reply ; but shortly after he went out mounted on one of his favourite hunters, and returned late in the afternoon on foot. Maude's heart was heavy ; she said not a word ; but when the moon was shining in the heavens, she slipped away and entered the stables—no Swiftfoot neighed in his stall. The first real sense of poverty fell across Maude's proud spirit. Unobserved she entered the house again, and that evening she redoubled her love and affection towards her father.

The next morning, the Squire put into Maude's hands the money she required—then she knew his hunter was really gone.

After this, the Squire received several letters from his brother, which seemed to perplex and annoy him, and finally resulted in another thinning of his stable ; followed by the startling announcement to Maude, that he must let the Manor !

It was given into an agent's hands, and sundry strange visitors invaded Maude's home retreat : curiosity seemed to bring them ; no

real wish to rent the place. Still Maude hoped on, hoped that her father might yet keep his Somerset home, and brighter things turn up.

Castle St. Agnes was shut and tenantless again. Cecil had left for Hatchworth immediately after Lucy's funeral, and Lord De Walden for the place in Essex, where his proud mother entertained numberless visitors, and filled her reception-rooms with the dance and the song. March found Cecil Erresford and Lord Sangford at their respective town houses, prosecuting their Parliamentary duties, though his lordship's voice and strength were somewhat weakened by the effects of a severe cold, caught at Lucy's funeral, and which clung to him still. The Easter week he passed at his estate in Surry, endeavouring to recruit his strength, while Flora read aloud to her Lord—endured his murmurs, and tried to please him and failed—then fell back upon mysteries after the manner of her married life; and doctors' and lawyers' daughters; the young ladies of a retired London merchant, and young ladies of the farms, all envied Lady Sangford her husband, her house, her equipages, her

servants, and counted her nods, and took humble copies of her dress, as they had done for three years past.

It was from Flora, Cecil first heard of the Squire's reverses. Stevens, who had come up to London for a holiday, surprised her late mistress with accounts of the diminution of the Squire's stud ; which was quickly followed by Flora seeing the Manor advertised to be let for a term of six years. She was not aware that at the expiration of this time, should the Squire have been unable to pay off the mortgage, the elder brother's estate would pass into the hands of the younger. Flora who was as ignorant of all her husband's affairs, as in the days of their separation, knew nothing of this unhappy mortgage ; the pain Flora's sensitive, just mind received, on the discovery that her husband had indeed induced Sir Edgar to make him the heir to his vast property, to the exclusion of the Aylmers, and that he was the relation, until whose death Archer had left her to pine away in solitude, would have been augmented ten-fold, had she known how completely Archer had drawn the Squire into his power, and for what end.



Flora could not bear to think that while they were rolling in wealth, Robert, the rightful heir to such a vast portion of it, was toiling arduously to enable him to live. It seemed to her also cruel and unjust in her husband to withhold help from his brother. She was troubled—the lines upon her fair brow increased. She wrote to Cecil begging him to come down and spend the following Sunday with her. Cecil came, they walked to church together in the morning. Flora started early, and took her brother round their beautifully kept grounds, and through some fields, where little lambs were sporting in the sun.

“You have brought me a pretty *détour*,” Cecil said, “it is very good of you, Flora.”

“I did not come this way for pleasure,” Flora replied. “I want to talk to you, Cecil. I wish you to tell me candidly if I have acted rightly towards my brother-in-law. I did it for the best, yet I tremble lest he should discover the author, and his pride be wounded.”

“Upon my word, Flora, you excite my curiosity wonderfully !” Cecil said laughing.

Flora smiled, but her smile was forced and quickly vanished.

“It is nothing laughable, Cecil; for poor Phil is in great difficulties.”

The expression on Cecil’s countenance changed from one of playfulness to great interest.

“Who is your authority, Flora?” he asked.

“Stevens told me all about it—my brother-in-law has sold his hunters. What do you think of that, Cecil? He has only one horse left?” Flora looked up enquiringly.

“That looks strange,” Cecil said musingly, then after a moment’s pause, he observed, “perhaps grief may have caused him to give up the chase; in that case retaining his hunters would be useless.”

“Yes, Cecil! but then the Manor is advertised to be let for six years. What can it mean, for Phil is so attached to the place?”

“It means, Flora, that he is in difficulties. I see clearly,” Cecil said thoughtfully. “I should not at all be surprised if he has mortgaged the estate.”

“ Oh, I hope not !” Flora replied. “ Well, Cecil, I wanted to tell you, I sent Phil a sum I thought would assist him, in secret, mind. I do so hope he will not find out the donor. Was I right ?” she asked anxiously. “ I am always so afraid of doing wrong.”

“ Poor old Flora !” Cecil said good-humouredly, “ so you have been playing the good sister to Phil Neville ! let me hear how you managed it.”

“ I forwarded it to him at different times by post-office orders on Branstone, signed in a fictitious name, and enclosed Phil a paper in a disguised hand and a name corresponding.”

Flora looked very frightened.

“ Well done, Flora !” said Cecil laughing, “ that will save poor Neville his riding horse. I cannot imagine how you conceived the idea.”

“ I wanted to do some good. I determined on the day of our dear Lucy’s funeral, I would try to begin, but it is slow work,” she said mournfully. “ I have more money than I know what to do with, and so few really useful channels for it to flow into.”

“Wish for them and they will appear,” Cecil said in a kind tone.

“How I wish I knew if Phil had really mortgaged the estate!” Flora said musingly.

“I will not rest until I have tried to find out,” was Cecil’s rejoinder..

“I wonder what the mortgage would be worth?” Flora said.

“That depends on many things—the extent of the property mortgaged, and the term of years. And then poor Neville is sure to be taken in.”

“Good-hearted and generous people are always made a prey,” added Flora.

Just at that moment the church bells struck up loudly, and emerging from a narrow footpath on to the high road, they encountered a troop of people wending their way church-ward. There were bows to be exchanged, and a few greetings, and finally the daughters of the retired resident of the villa made so many kind inquiries after his lordship’s cold, that they lasted all the way to the church door; and then the young ladies entered their pew with their minds so

filled with her ladyship's handsome brother, as to lose their places many times in their velvet-bound prayer-books, and to be quite at a loss concerning the substance of a very high-flown sermon delivered by a meagre curate, who, having fasted through Lent, wore a dejected and weary appearance, claiming rather pity than either approval or ridicule.

The afternoon was accompanied by a violent storm of hail and rain. As Lady Sangford did not go again to church, she distributed books among her servants. She fancied it was what Lucy would have done, had she been mistress of a large household. Flora liked to endeavour to imitate Lucy; she could not have taken a sweeter example. Ah! how those words were verified in the sleeping Lucy, "She being dead, yet speaketh!"

It rained on, and the wind blew cold around the house, when Flora sat down by her dressing-room fire. She wanted something to read, so she took from a locked drawer a packet of Lucy's letters. Flora slowly perused them, and wept as she read,

and formed resolves. One or two passages particularly called forth both resolve and deep thought. In one dated "Rome," Lucy, in reply to a repining letter from Lady Sangford, wrote: "To be happy, dear Flora, we must be holy, and to be holy we must love Heaven better than all the world, better than ourselves!" There was one very old letter, written in the early days of their friendship. The hand was scarcely formed; a bunch of dried violets rested between the paper. "There was a beautiful sunset to-night; even the ground looked golden. I stood in the portico till dusk, until the sun was gone, and the stars had come, and I fancied I knew a little what angels felt, only they see within Heaven, and I had been looking without. Dear Lady Flora, what a day that will be when we stand by the angels within, never more to leave the golden gates." Her last letter, dated from "Rome" ended with these words: "Flora, do not pity me; I hope on; and hope ends in a harp and a crown!"

Flora laid down the letters, and her face

was bathed in tears. "I will, will live as Lucy lived, that I may die as Lucy died, and win a crown too," Flora murmured.

She gathered up her precious letters, put them carefully under lock and key, then sat reviewing her life past and present. She found very few bright spots in it. Thus dreamily occupied, she remained till the fire became low. The hail pattered against the windows with a fury that threatened to beat them in. She felt lonely and desolate, and went down stairs to join her husband. He was walking up and down the library with his arms crossed, and his coat buttoned up to the chin. Occasionally he paused and looked out of the long windows, and swore at the verandah for making the room so dark. Flora looked alarmed, but she went up to him, and put her hand on his arm. Archer took no notice of her, but continued his walk. Cecil, who was sitting by the fire, rose as Flora came in, and asked her what she thought of the storm.

Flora's reply was, "Oh! the weather is very dismal!"

"What in the name of goodness have

you been doing with yourself all this time?" Archer said.

"Reading and dreaming," Flora replied, with a timid smile.

"If you had wanted to go to church again, you could have had the horses out," Archer said impatiently.

"Oh, yes Archer! thank you, I know, but the weather was much too bad."

"I should think the thermometer must be below zero, it is freezing to the bone!" Archer shrugged his shoulders and dropped Flora's arm. He opened the door, and looked into the verandah; "if it clears, we will take a turn, Erresford."

"Oh, Archer dear!" Flora began, then stopped suddenly and looked frightened.

"Would you not do wrong in going out?" Cecil said, "this cold, damp air is the very worst thing for your chest, Sangford."

"Tush!" exclaimed Archer, "folly! nursing is only for women!" The chill air blew in from the open door, Flora shivered, Archer retreated. "There is a break in the clouds," he said, "these April evenings often turn out fine."



“I question for to-night,” Cecil rejoined.

Archer took up the newspaper and lounged in an easy chair. Flora stood near a window and indulged in painful thoughts occasioned by Archer’s cough.

Presently Cecil said :

“I am going to run down to Forsted early this week—can I take any message for you ?”

“None, Erresford,” replied Archer, still occupied with the paper.

“Oh ! Cecil, you can take that little likeness of Lucy I have copied for Phil,” Flora exclaimed.

“Phil is trying to let the place, and wisely too,” said Archer. “If he does not try some other means of living, I do not know what is to become of him. I have helped him till I can help him no longer.”

Flora looked surprised, and Cecil said :

“What has he done with his yearly income?” at the same time giving Archer a peculiarly searching look.

“That is best known to himself,” was Archer’s short reply.

"I hope he has not mortgaged the estate," said Cecil.

"It is what many extravagant men do," Archer replied carelessly.

"Has he ever hinted at the possibility of such a thing?" asked Cecil.

"He talked of it years ago."

"We will hope it ended there," said Cecil. "It is generally fools who mortgage, and knaves who entice them into it."

Archer rose, and paced the room again.

"He has only one daughter to think of now. The best thing he can do is to marry her to some rich fellow; and surely the leavings from his extravagance would keep Phil, with a little assistance now and then."

Flora looked proud of her husband. Cecil looked at him, but not proudly; there was contempt mingled with pity in his gaze.

"Phil might have made a fine thing out of that estate," Archer went on. "A little money laid out on the houses, and he could have raised the rents to advantage."

“Oh! but the people are so poor!” ventured Flora.

“Let them work,” was Archer’s rejoinder. “Soft landlords get nothing for their pains. My maxim is, ‘Charity begins at home.’”

“My maxim is, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself,” Cecil said in a straight-forward tone.

“Ah, my good fellow! you were born rich; you can afford to be sentimental!” Archer replied contemptuously.

The storm ceased; there was even a bright sunset. Archer walked with Cecil till dusk. Flora remained at home, and cried about Archer’s cough, and thought over their conversation.

That very evening, the Squire and Maude walked up and down the path between the shrubberies, in earnest conversation.

“It is time we should leave, Maude, when I have presents of charity sent me. You do not think it can be Erresford?”

“Certainly not, papa; the signatures are in a lady’s hand. Besides, Mr. Erresford would never do so.”

Maude's colour heightened, and her proud lip curled.

"It must have been intended in kindness ; but it is a most ill-judged thing !"

"I am certain Archer will keep his word," the Squire said. "It was part of the agreement, that no one should know of the mortgage. I have got some pride left, and will never live upon any one's bounty."

"Papa, would it not be almost best," Maude said, "to accept that offer you had of letting the Manor for two years—at the end of that time you might find another tenant?"

"Where are we to go, Maude?" the Squire asked. "It must be some precious cheap place, where we can save. If I could only pay off the mortgage in six years ! It breaks my heart to think of the old place going away from you !"

"Oh ! never mind me, papa," replied Maude. "What do you think of some German village—we could live upon almost nothing there?"

"Such living as it would be !" grumbled the Squire. "We should be poisoned by sour wines and greasy cooking."

Maude laughed a dreary sort of laugh ; and just then, when feeling particularly forlorn, was it strange that her thoughts flew to Cecil Erresford ? Why should she think of him, I wonder ?

“ I am glad my poor little flower knew none of this trouble,” the Squire said, turning his head away. “ We did well to keep the mortgage from her. Maude, it breaks my heart to think how it would have grieved hers to see the old home go into other hands, even though it should be one of our own family who becomes its master.”

Maude sighed, and a tear fell on her black dress.

“ We must act in some way, papa,” she said firmly.

“ It was a good offer that man made yesterday — two years. Ah, well ! as you say, we can get some one else for the other four.”

“ We could save immensely by living on the continent, papa,” pleaded Maude. “ Perhaps in two years we could pay off the house.”

“ Ay, and the next four might save the

land. My poor old cottages must go. Archer would make a tight landlord to 'the old folks."

"Perhaps Uncle Archer would extend the length of time, and so enable you to pay off all, papa," suggested Maude.

"Your uncle is a straighter man than I took him for. I wrote him several letters on that very subject, and his answers were not altogether what I liked. Never mind! I have burnt 'em—the best plan with disagreeables in black and white."

"I am sure we do not want Uncle Archer's help," Maude said proudly; "do we, papa?"

"Let him keep it if he likes it—let every fellow do what he pleases with his own. Archer has saved, and I have been a spend-thrift; we both reap the harvest of our sown oats—mine is a famine, his a land of plenty. I don't envy him or any man, or hate them as some folks do, because they are rich."

"That is a mean and vulgar spirit," Maude said. "You, dear papa, can never accuse yourself of anything but generosity."

"Heigho!" sighed the Squire. "The last has been a woeful year. My sweet bird has

flown where I can never bring her back again—there will be no one left soon to put flowers about her grave.” The Squire’s voice grew husky, as he said again : “woeful times these have been !”

Maude’s tears fell fast.

The Squire put his arm over her shoulder.

“Never mind, my queen, we will try and save the home yet.”

“Oh, papa ! it is not the ‘home’—it is our Lucy I mourn for. No troubles were troubles as long as we had her with us ; now it is all dark !”

The Squire groaned, Maude roused herself and tried to comfort him, but failed. His lost ‘bird’ had been his comforter—every one’s comforter—but Lucy was not ; the angels had come for her ! That night, when every one thought the Squire slept, he climbed the church-yard gate, and stood by her grave. A plain white stone bearing her name and age, and the simple word ‘Peace’ beneath, marked where she was laid to rest ; he stood there in the starry night, and wept, and called his child back, but no voice could answer !

“The next day the Squire’s home was rented by a stranger.

Cecil did visit Forsted, thinking much of Maude, and longing to extricate the Squire from any troubles into which his old habits of extravagance and love of the turf might have involved him ; but to his great disappointment, his bright plans were all damped, by finding Maude proud and reserved, and her father very tardy in communicating anything concerning himself and his own affairs. He assumed an indifferent tone when he spoke of having let the house, and hoped Cecil would come on the continent in the summer, and pay them a visit. Of course, Cecil enquired where they were going to take up their residence, and heard, with surprise, that they had already fixed on the neighbourœd of Coblenz, according to the advice of Captain Prescott, who had lived there many years on half-pay, before coming into a property.

Cecil was more then ever convinced that something had gone unusually wrong with the Squire, though what that wrong was, baffled all his ingenuity to discover ; and he returned



to London dissatisfied, and with his plans and wishes unfulfilled.

A fortnight after his visit, the Squire and Maude called to bid him farewell, before leaving England. They brought little Harry with them, and at Cecil's request, left him for the afternoon. It was interesting to see the care Cecil took of Lucy's child—their visit to a bazaar, and the carriage full of toys Harry brought back. It was from the child Cecil learnt that Stevens was gone, and 'Aunt Maude' was his nurse now—this still more convinced him of their reduced circumstances. The Squire and Maude remained with Lord Sangford during the few days they sojourned in town. Flora did all she could to ascertain the state of the Squire's affairs, but he was as reserved with her as with Cecil, and only said that Maude and he required change. The Squire half suspected Flora to be the sender of the two-hundred pounds, but he hardly liked to charge her with it, so the money was lodged at his banker's, ready to be repaid whenever he should be able to discover the donor.

Archer's health continued to decline. He

had worn thinner even in the fortnight since he had returned to town. The Squire begged him to take care of himself, to rest awhile, and was kind and brotherly as only the Squire would be to one who returned his affection so coldly.

“If you get worse, old boy, only send for me, and I will nurse you. Phil Neville never forgets, and you have been a kind brother to me!” were the Squire’s words at parting. Archer’s were—

“You are a great fool to exile yourself, Phil!”

The Squire wrote often to his brother from Andernach, their place of abode. Archer responded seldom. At last, as summer advanced, Lord Sangford’s letters ceased; then came one from Flora, relating how Archer had been brought home half dead one day from the House, and that he was sinking fast. Flora’s postscript contained the words “Pity me!”

It was the first of July when Squire Neville drove into Belgrave Square, where Lord Sangford’s town house stood. It was a splendid mansion containing reception-rooms

that were the talk of the polite world ; indeed, the highest compliment that could be paid to any saloons was to compare them to Lady Sangford's. Some people have been known to ask if she enjoyed them ? How could they make such a remark ? Of course her Ladyship could not exist without them ! Elegant queen-like creature !" these were epithets constantly bestowed on her, and of much envy had she been the innocent cause. Who envied her now, when at twelve o'clock that summer's day, just as the Squire arrived at his brother's door, the servants closed the shutters of the splendid mansion. Archer, Lord Sangford, had passed away into the land where rank, wealth, and fame follow not.

Lady Sangford was a widow. After four years of married life, the husband she had made her idol, and whose slave she had been, was carried off in the zenith of his power and ambition ; a neglected cold ended in a rapid decline, and death laid him beneath a splendid monument in England's Abbey. A fellow-statesman eulogized his memory in the House, and part of this eulogy figured on his tomb. It proclaimed to the world his virtues

in public life. He was a friend to his country, a conscientious performer of every duty—commanding the respect and esteem of his equals, the love of his inferiors—then in private life, the tomb set him up as an example to husbands, sons and brothers—to masters and landowners. Was the tomb truth-telling or exaggerating, is a question, not one of the gazers at the full length figure looking sternly down on them, and the lines of carved letters below, ever paused to enquire.

The simple stone still white and fresh beneath St. Walburga's shade, bears the one word "Peace!" Forsted people often come when their day's hard labour is ended, and stay awhile, tending and watering the flowers that grow around that grave. Old Robbins has transplanted Lucy's favourite white blush rose from his own cottage garden, and village maidens have hedged it round with violets and snowdrops to blossom in the spring; the village children never throw stones or tread carelessly near this spot—they linger reverently about it; and one little girl often says her prayers by the gentle Lucy's grave. Every rustic villager believes in the truth of "Peace,"

as applied to her. Her life exemplified it, her death sealed it ; and they know there is peace in her golden home beyond the white summer clouds ; as sure as they wish to get there, they know she is at peace. There is no need to fill up that white stone, by telling old and young that she was a good wife, mother, daughter, sister ; they know it—they have seen her the joy of her husband in days of smoothness ; and when sorrows came, they have seen her lighten them, and enduring patiently, rest when her work was done.

They know her childish laugh was brightest when her boy was in her arms ; they knew she was sweet as the lily and the violet to her father—the pride of her sister. What need to tell them she was the friend of the poor ? One and all would stand forth to proclaim it. The ignorant and sick, as well as the happy and robust, would all tell you and vie with each other in declaring it. They were sick, and she visited them—she rejoiced with those that rejoiced, and mourned in their time of sorrow ! So there is no need to raise a proud monument in memory of the young wife of the Vicar of Forsted. Her memory lives in the hearts of

those around—she sleeps beneath the fair, fresh flowers, not beneath the cold stone where the statesman is laid.

The stately Countess carried her widowed daughter away to the estate in Essex, and among the haunts of her dreary childhood. Lady Sangford nursed her sorrow : it was of a bitter kind, intense love without respect—idolatry without one perfection in the idol. Such had been her life, and now she refused to be comforted. The whole of husband's property was left to his widow, and among the papers relating to this almost regal wealth, were recovered the deeds which mortgaged the Manor.

## CHAPTER XII.

“Ce que je désire et que j’aime,  
C’est toujours toi, c’est toujours toi.  
Pour mon âme le bien supreme,  
C’est encore toi, c’est encore toi.  
Si j’ai de beaux jours dans la vie,  
Ah! c’est par toi,  
Et mes larmes qui les essuye?  
C’est encore toi, c’est encore toi.”

THE path under the hills, leading to Andernach was golden with sunshine. Wild flowers grew at its edges, and the fruit trees lining the roads beyond were tempting, and produced Eve-like thoughts. The sky overhead was dazzling in its brightness, and all nature looked so glad and beautiful, it was enough to make one sing for joy.

Along this path, on an August evening,

came. Squire Neville, handsome and sunburnt, bearing on his shoulder his sturdy little grandson brandishing a tiny whip and calling, "gee, wo, horsey" and looking a little shadow of himself. On went the Squire, and when he was nearly out of sight, Maude, a large black straw hat shading her face, came along the hill-side path, and Cecil Erresford was by her side. Every now and then she stopped to cull a floweret, and presently, rather saucily she answered to something he had been saying.

"Really, you are made of hope! Well, it is a good ingredient in one's composition!"

"It is," replied Cecil, "I have hoped many things—all are realized save one; but I hope on, that this, the dearest hope of my hopes, may not be hoped in vain."

Maude picked up a pebble, and tossing it into the flowing river, at her feet, watched it fall, leaving behind it numberless air circlets all merging one into the other. "How still and clear the water is, you might almost fancy you could see my pebble."

"How thankful it must feel to you for transporting it from the dusty path to that



cool bed, no one to trample it under foot—no wheels to grind it, or crush it?”

“You speak feelingly, as if you had lived and known a pebble’s life,” Maude said.

“I like now and then to imagine myself in the place of inanimate nature,” Cecil replied.

“Really, Mr. Erresford, I did not think you were such a dreamer!”

“It has gradually crept over me since I have joined you at Andernach. I find it a delicious disease.”

“I fear I am totally matter-of-fact. I never indulge myself thus,” Maude sighed.

“You never take ideal flights? Oh, Miss Neville, that is *ganz und gar unmöglich*! people with your eyes and temperament *must* dream. You have far off eyes, and a nature to throw around you fairy webs of gold.”

“You utterly mistake me. I remember only one day dream;” Maude’s eyes overflowed with tears. “It was that dreadful day when my darling sister was laid to her rest, and as I looked at the snow-covered grave, I longed to die and rest by her side. I shut my eyes, and in my dream I looked back from the

shores of the silent land on the mortals I left behind."

"You looked back on unquenchable tears! That was a cruel dream, which left all behind you so unmurmuringly."

Maude said softly, "I had not a thought but of her, until my eyes fell on my father."

"Ah, he is worth living for!" Cecil exclaimed, pulling as he went the flowers from the way-side.

"Do you not think papa looks brighter, Mr. Erresford? I do feel very grateful to you, for papa tells me, though he loves and adores *her* memory every hour of the day with increasing intensity, yet you have taught him, if she could look down, it would grieve her tender heart to see him grieve so. He does not foster sorrow, but tries to be cheerful again for Harry's sake and mine." Maude looked very beautiful as she said this, looking up with her deep, speaking eyes; a heap of stones almost crossed their path. Cecil called it 'the hill of difficulties,' and gave Maude his hand to assist her. "These stones are like the roughs of life," he said in a low tone. "I only wish your roughs might be as easily

surmounted, and I ever near to help you over."

Maude sprang down the rest with a bound as much as to say, "I can help myself!" one moment retaining only the shade of gravity in look and manner which she had never lost since the shock of her sister's sudden death; the next, all her proud brilliancy hanging around her. Cecil thought her perfectly enchanting. There was a moment's silence; then Cecil said:

"I wish we had my sister Flora here to sketch the landscape from this *point de vue*. Her beautiful artistic taste would produce an effect."

"It really is charming—the lovely flowers and the noble river flowing beneath us, with the golden flush over all; and those peasants would come in so well in the foreground with papa and Harry. What a pity you are not an artist!"

"If I were, lady fair, I should not have spoiled it by your omission."

"We were the originators; decidedly we ought to keep out of our own picture," Maude said. "I think it was quite a well-judged

omission. 'The artist does not usually place himself in his own group.'

"The picture would be sadly incomplete, were Miss Neville left out. Stay a moment—*voyons!*" Cecil took from his pocket a letter, and, begging the pencil from Maude's watch-chain, he sketched, on the unwritten side of the note, a tolerably correct outline of the figures *en avant*, Maude and himself in the rear, with hills and tree clumps in the back ground.

"I opine Flora would form a *chef-d'œuvre* from this," said Cecil. "Her colouring would come in to perfection."

"You have managed it capitally," replied Maude laughing, as she looked at the sketch. "There will be no occasion to number it after the fashion of a Royal Academy frame—A, the peasant's cart; B, the driver; C, Harry *en avant*, etc."

"I am glad of your favourable opinion; for I imagined Harry bore some resemblance to a plant, species unknown."

"One of the *Kohlruben* tribe," Maude added. "His hat certainly is ambiguous." Maude lifted her head from the sketch. "But the original has passed away from sight.

Mr. Erresford, they have rounded that hilly curve, I suppose."

"*N'importe*, they have left us to the sweets of solitude," replied Cecil.

" 'Oh! solitude, where are thy charms?' " said Maude. "I cannot imagine how any one can chaunt its praises. I am entirely a gregarious animal."

"Oh! Miss Neville, you would not detract from solitude, were you a dreamer!"

"I prefer reality to dreams—I never was of an imaginative temperament. I can enjoy scenery, and carry its delights away in my memory; but I cannot poetize ou it. Of course, you versify occasionally?"

"*Quelquefois*! I have been in a poetic frame the last few days. At some future time I shall ask you to be my critic."

"Mind, I am a severe one," Maude replied. "Oh! stay just one moment! what a lovely bed of flowers?"

Erresford sprang up the bank, singing, as he culled the bright blossoms, the sixth of Mendelsohn's two-part songs, which Maude had taught him. Maude took up the

words, and the air rang with their clear voices.

“Oh! what a heavenly spot this is!” she exclaimed, as Cecil came down the bank, and placed a bunch of flowers in her hand.

“It is verily and truly a golden hour in a golden day,” replied Cecil. “But surely there must be ‘forget-me-nots’ somewhere in this moist spot; our song is incomplete without them. ‘*Vergiss-mein-nicht und Ehren-preiss und veilchen sind dabei.*’ Ah! I see a blue nook of them on the water’s edge!”

“Papa has been picking some for Harry,” said Maude. “There are footmarks.”

“The flowers are nearly past and over now,” remarked Cecil; “nevertheless, there are some for us.”

Maude’s proud eyes rested on the sky-reflecting waters, as Cecil broke off the tiny flowerets. When he brought them to her, he said in an earnest tone:

“If I were to improvise on the spot, would you bear with me patiently and leniently?”

“That depends,” Maude replied, “on the rhyme, and the metre, and a thousand other things. Still I grant permission. Begin.”

Maude fastened her “forget-me-nots” in the brooch of her shawl, and looked far away in the distance, while Cecil indulged his poetic flight.

“ ‘Forget-me-not !’ ’tis the voice of flowers,  
Telling of swiftly-fleeting hours,  
When the sun like a glory fell  
O’er mountain path, o’er lowland dell.

“ ‘Forget-me-not !’ ’tis the carol of birds,  
A music fit for sweetest words,  
Which asks for friendship’s richest boon,  
Lest mem’ry fade, and pass too soon.

“ ‘Forget-me-not !’ ’tis the soft breeze’s sigh,  
As gentle hearts are passing by,  
And gives the soul the tender thought,  
Which makes all else appear as nought.

“ ‘Forget-me-not !’ in your true, noble heart,  
Oh ! could I claim the humblest part !  
I then would in elysium rest,  
With peace and joy for ever blest.

“ ‘ Forget-me-not !’ and my voice I’ll raise,  
In glowing strains of fondest praise,  
While songs of happiness and love,  
Forget not ! echo from above.”

There was a hushed stillness when the thrilling accents of Cecil’s voice ceased to fall on the breezy air. It might have been only the sunlight playing over Maude’s face, that it wore such a glow—a glow which shone even from her large, speaking eyes ; or was it from the heart within that this summer-glow came ? Who could tell ? She gazed on at the mountains shading far off with the clouds and sky, and thus uniting the earth and the Heavens, and her ruby-coloured lips were unparted. Thus she walked on, her hands hanging down full of flowers—a very Flora, herself the queen of flowers. And silently the companion at her side trod the uneven, sloping path, until they came to a sudden bend crossed by a little stream, over which a piece of wood was laid. Maude stood still here, and looked around.

“ We must turn back up the mountain here,” Cecil said ; and he held out his hand



to assist her over the rough bridge, but she sprang lightly over unaided, and went on, with her head erect, and the light bending over her. She started when Cecil's voice again broke the stillness. "Maude!" he said, in a deep, earnest tone.

She turned her face round, and her proud expression was strangely softened.

"May it be?" he asked, in a low voice. "Will you become the 'forget-me-not,' and ever bloom on my life's path?"

She paused a moment; then stooping down, and raising one of the flowers from its lowly bed near the mountain stream, placed it in his hand. Her lips quivered: she was too proud to trust herself to speak. He pressed the flower to his lips, then said:

"Maude, I must tell you the early thoughts of my heart. It is due to you that you should hear them, ere you answer me. Maude, I have loved before!"

She kept her head erect, her eyes cast down, her lips unparted; and he went on, in a low, whispering tone:

"Yes, Maude! the day we first met my

heart was filled with a joy I never felt before. And yet Maude, it was not for you."

Maude raised her head, and her bright, dark eyes glanced on him.

"It was she our flower—our sweet lily! Who could see her, and not love her! It is past and long gone by now, and is supplanted by another and deeper feeling which nought on earth can eradicate. You do not reject me because I loved her first, Maude, loved one?" he said in a thrilling tone.

"I only wonder," she replied in a low voice, "how you can care for me after her. Mr. Erresford, we were in every way different; you, who studied her, knew well what she was—so patient, so enduring, and you must have seen how self-willed and head-strong I am."

"You shall be self-willed if you please, to counterbalance the noble candour and entire unselfishness, that stand every chance of converting my love into idolatry."

She smiled mournfully as she said, "Take care you do not spoil me. I am not proof against it, as she was."

"Maude!" Cecil said suddenly, resting his

hand on hers, and drawing her attention to a sun-tipped cloud, dark below, above one blaze of purple and crimson, and encircled at the edges like a glory.

“ Ah, it is beautiful !” she said, “ almost beyond beauty.” Then lifting up her eyes with a trembling archness, “ You will read me some good lesson from its brilliancy.”

“ Not a lesson, but a truth. That cloud is like our life, if we look only earthward. It was, nay still is dark, for we can never call our angel sister back ; but look above, how it shines even as she shines in heaven ! Let us, sweet Maude, shine on earth so as to meet her there, when the day breaks and the shadows flee away.”

Maude’s tears flowed fast down her cheeks. Cecil kept a moment’s silence : they both thought, even in the day of their love, of her who would have rejoiced over it.

The Squire and Harry had taken their ramble and arrived at the house, which formed their temporary home, while the sun was yet shining in the sky, but it had sunk to rest.

Cecil and Maude returned, her hands

full of flowers, her hair damp with the evening dew, beautiful Maude ! She brushed past her father, who stood at the entrance, and ran up-stairs to her own room, and wept sore, even in the midst of her joy, that her Lucy was not there to share it !

As Cecil walked to and fro the sloping garden, when the evening hour blended with the calm of night, the light in her casement shone on him like a star : but he knew not that his loved ‘Forget-me-not’ knelt long and silently, and asked that she too might be good and noble, and deserve to share the love, the honour, that were everywhere showered on him ; and that in his proud self-willed Maude, might be found all that made her sister, his first love, so lovely and holy.

That dark winter had been followed by strange events. First came Archer’s premature death, which, though it had been a blow to the Squire, still the little attachment there had ever been on the part of the younger brother, had softened his loss to the elder. Then, just as the Squire was making up his mind to endure a continental exile, for purposes of economy, Flora, by cancelling

the mortgage, and destroying the deeds, restored the Manor into his hands—the Manor, his old ancestral home, the scene of his life's joys and of its greatest sorrows, was his once more. No more heavy mortgage—no more fears that it might not descend to Maude. The Squire's heart was lightened, and when he returned to Andernach with Cecil Erresford as his companion, he could do nothing but anticipate Maude's delight when she knew that there was nothing to prevent the old Manor becoming, at the end of the two years, their home again. The Squire, too, had had the satisfaction of restoring to Flora the money that had been so strangely sent him, and of which he had discovered that she was the donor.

Cecil had been with them a week, ere he took that delicious walk with Maude; and told to her already predisposed heart the thoughts which had so long occupied his.

The Squire rejoiced in his future son-in-law. His own words on the subject were: "A king could not have pleased him better." And that very evening the Squire talked of the time when he should return to his

home, and vowed that nothing should again lead him into those habits which had so nearly forfeited it.

Flora's sorrow on finding the deeds of mortgage was great, but her first act after her husband's death was to destroy them, and so place beyond possibility the Manor ever falling into her hands. Ah, poor Flora! the ill-gotten property was a burden to her. She wished she could make restitution to Robert Aylmer and his sister of Sir Edgar Tyrrell's wealth. But how to do so seemed difficult; it was so interwoven and entangled with other wealth. But one load was taken off her mind when she knew the Squire's home was really his own again, unincumbered and free from all fear of hereafter losing it. Flora offered her brother-in-law the use of her country estate, until the present tenants of the Manor should leave. She said it would be a pleasure to her to know that he had a comfortable English home; and that Maude and Harry need no longer remain far away from all who loved them. The offer was made with such real sincerity, that the Squire, seeing the satisfaction it would give Flora,

felt he could not refuse, and returned to Andernach, accompanied by Cecil, to fetch Maude and Harry away. Cecil longed ardently that Maude would consent to become his bride at early season, nor did the Squire offer any objection. Maude, however, resisted all Cecil's intreaties. When she had seen her father once more settled in the old manorial house, when she had seen Robert reinstated in the Vicarage, and her trust of Lucy's child should be over, then Maude would be Cecil's bride. Noble Maude ! Cecil admired her doubly for this, and patiently he waited and longed for the day to come, when Lucy's loved sister should be his own loved wife.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“The kind heart speaks with words so kindly sweet,  
That kindred hearts the catching tones repeat.  
And love therewith, his soft sigh gently blending,

JOANNA BAILLIE.

It is the last day of the week. The day's labour done, the cottager rests at his doorstep, while children play around his knee. The corn is safely housed in the barns; the cattle slumber in their sheds; the birds nestle their heads beneath their wings; flies dance about; and the shadows of the sunset play around. The air is still and balmy, and Forsted St. Agnes looks very peaceful. The Vicarage looks very peaceful too. The doors stand open, and the perfume of the honeysuckle embowering the verandah is



wafted into the little, low-ceilinged drawing-room, where the last sunbeam plays on a picture. It is a face young and fair, and it rests on cloudlets—oh, it is very sweet ! Is it meant for an angel, I wonder ? Who stands before it, with figure tall and slight, young still, but on whose brow lines are marked, and among whose thick brown hair streaks of grey are plentifully mingled, and whose eyes are full of resigned sorrow ? He calls towards him a noble, bright-eyed boy, and lifts him up to the picture in the clouds, with the softly uttered words, “ Kiss mamma, Harry ! ” and the child’s rosy lips press the still, spirit-like face, and the child’s innocent voice lisps : “ Good-night, dear mamma,” and then he is carried on his father’s shoulder to his little snow-white bed ; and he kneels at his father’s knee and repeats his simple prayer, and its burden is, that he may be “ a good boy and meet mamma in Heaven.” And then his father leaves him after his evening’s kiss and blessing, with his fond nurse, Stevens, who united to her faithful John, now forms part of Robert’s household.

Solitary the Vicar of Forsted stands by his Lucy's picture, and gazes long, and oh! how sadly! until tears fall fast and silently. Then he hurries them away, and goes forth into the village, and looks in at the cottage homes of those his Lucy loved best. When the evening light was fading, he sat beneath a tree in a sweet garden, where a brook sang beneath a rustic bridge, and sweet-williams and pansies flowered, and talked of Sunday to a group of children, talked of Sunday on earth, and the one everlasting Sabbath in Heaven. Then he taught them a hymn ere they parted for the night, and the father of the children stood by with his hat off, and his fine honest English face all reverent attention, as Robert led on the young voices, who repeated, after him, the words 'Oh that will be joyful, when we meet to part no more! and echo from the hill-tops rising up among the stars, gives back the words: "Part no more!"

Then the vicar rose and shook hands with the labourer, and bade 'God bless him and his!' and as his feet trod the path to the Vicarage, and his eyes looked whither

his heart ever wandered, to Lucy's home—echo and the children's sweet voices repeated: 'It will be joyful when we meet to part no more!' Sing on, young hearts, take up the strain, deep echo, reiterate it from the lonely hill—send comfort to the lonely-hearted man. No more parting! Again and again let the strain waken up his joy and soothe his sorrow—and tell him—oh children! tell him, oh echo! of the time when there shall be no more goings out, no more comings in! 'Oh, that will be joyful!'

This was the second day of Robert's return. The third was Sunday—a never to be forgotten one in the annals of Forsted, when the young vicar made his recantation sermon. He preached of repentance—humble was the confession he made of his errors, humble his hopes of future good and usefulness. The Squire in his pew could scarce refrain from an exclamation of "Well said, Bob!" Maude bent down her head. She recalled all who had been in that church the last time he preached.

Cecil looked not at the past, but the dawn of a bright future. Harry wondered why his papa's voice grew so low at the end of

the sermon; and why at its conclusion, he cried, yes, Harry was sure ‘papa was crying!’ The child wondered and looked until Lady Anne’s beautiful organ played the congregation out with the ‘Hallelujah Chorus.’ But the congregation seemed loth to go, and stood about the porch, and among the grave-stones of the churchyard. Those who had been Robert’s staunchest opposers some years back, waited till he appeared among them, to tender hearty expressions of allegiance and promise of holding by him in opposition to any one else; and had it not been Sunday, probably three cheers would have rent the air to welcome the return of the Vicar, and the Squire of Forsted St. Agnes, but these were reserved for another occasion. The Squire and his Maude came back to the Manor a week before Robert’s arrival at the Vicarage. How the Squire luxuriated in his former haunts, the familiar voices of his old friends, the hearty welcome of the villagers! and Maude was happy in the knowledge that she had done her duty to her father and Lucy’s child.

It was surprising how soon after their return to Forsted, every one fell into his old

occupations. A few days saw the Squire on Dyke Moor, riding after the hounds. He could trust himself safely at the hunt now ; he had learned a lesson on betting which he never would forget. But the Squire's intense love of the chase was diminished, a taste for farming seemed to be superseding it ; he amused Maude by attending the weekly cattle market at Arminster, and sending home some oxen and sheep, for whose reception he hurdled off a great piece of pasture land, at the end of his property, hitherto suffered to run to waste ; and every morning the Squire donned a white hat, and went out to inspect his live stock. Maude superintended her housekeeping as of old, took daily rides with Cecil Erresford, and visited her old cottage friends. Augusta Neville, who had been staying about with her numerous acquaintances, came to the Manor, and asked the Squire to receive her as his housekeeper ; the fair Augusta, at last, disgusted with all her matrimonial schemes, had determined on settling quietly down as an old maid. Since the Squire's absence from Forsted she had been twice engaged, first to Count Arlais, who left her to marry a dressmaker,

and then to Sir Joseph Fairfield's son, whom she heartily despised, even while she accepted him, and who mortified one day by her coldness, went off in a sudden freak to Australia ; so Augusta protested there her love affairs should end. The Squire said it was "very jolly" of her to come and take care of him in his old age ; and in a very short time, the belle of many a London circle settled down into the Squire's country companion—entered into his farming plans, and even rode to Arminster with him on market days, waiting at the house of a friend while he made his purchases. Robert Aylmer was settled quietly too : he worked hard in his parish to atone for his former neglect, taught in his schools, gave cottage lectures, took care of his little Harry ; and every night, before he returned home from his labours, he paused awhile by his Lucy's grave. The young Earl who found the air of Forsted not sufficiently bracing for his weak nerves, had taken up his abode with his mother, in Essex, where Flora is his kind and loving companion, though how long that will last, seems difficult to determine, as Lord Glendowan has lately found Wood Hall an

extremely agreeable abode, and walking and driving with Flora, an extremely agreeable recreation; and the long conversations they hold together in solitary nooks of the grounds, are a great source of interest to the young Earl, who wonders what they can have to say. At times, he chose to join in these conversations, which embarrassed my Lord and the Lady Flora; so the Countess has given herself up to amuse her invalid son, and plays the part of an amiable mother better than one could have expected, considering how late in life she has commenced it. However, we will use the homely proverb, and say, "Better late than never!"

Poor Lady Anne is never spoken of in the Countess's presence now. A very short time after Lord Sangford's death, she devoted herself and all her property to the forming a sisterhood on an extensive scale, in the north of England, where she steadfastly refuses to see any of her relations.

It was June when the Squire returned home: but it was not until September, that the talk of the village was Maude's coming wedding. It was to be extremely quiet, to

remind them as little as possible of Lucy's. Flora presented Maude with a beautiful *trousseau*, and the Countess gave her a set of splendid jewels. Her ladyship approved of her son's choice; indeed, in her old age she seemed completely changed, and appeared to like everything, but the bustle and gaiety of a London life, which used to form her chief delight, but which now she found tiresome and stupid. The Countess certainly would have liked her son's wedding to have been celebrated with some show and festivity; but when she saw that still all hearts mourned for Lucy, and no one liked to revive the remembrance of her wedding-day, and how they all desired to spare Robert's feelings, as much as possible—she refrained from her wishes and suggestions, and ended by saying she had no doubt it would be elegant and pretty.

It was on a bright September morning, when the sun shone over leaves of red and gold, and an autumn wind blew little snowy clouds about the sky, that Forsted church doors were opened, and Forsted church-yard was filled with villagers. Cecil Erresford, with his brother as groomsman, walked



through their midst, speaking kind words as they passed.

Shortly after, the Countess and Flora, escorted by Lord Glendowan, made their appearance, quietly but elegantly dressed, and took their places by the chancel, where Augusta Neville joined them. Then the Squire brought the bride in her handsome white dress and long veil. Very close by her side stood Lucy's child, looking wonderingly up at her face, while his father, pale and agitated, read the service, and united his Lucy's sister to his own beloved friend. His voice just remained steady to the end of the service, and as Cecil and Maude waited for him to pass out of the chancel gates, Cecil pressed his hand in token of thanks and sympathy.

There were flowers thrown for Maude, and bells rung, and Maude looked very happy. The Countess had sent an elegant little breakfast from the Castle, at which the bride and bridegroom were present, and then they went away for their little tour. An old shoe was thrown after them by the servants, and blessings went after them from the poor, who had

all a good dinner sent to their cottages that day, as there was to be no gathering till Mr. Erresford could be present to make it merry.

Robert took a long walk over the hills that afternoon, and did not return till late in the evening. None knew where he went ; they supposed to some quiet spot to hide the grief called forth by the remembrance of his own happy wedding day.

Flora sent all over the village, and saw that every one had good cheer ; and many of the villagers said they hoped to hear the bells ring for her very soon, at which Flora coloured, and was glad Lord Glendowan was not within hearing.

It was strange that she neither considered him old nor eccentric now. On the contrary, she painted a likeness of him during his absence, and thought what a nice picture he made ; and every day she found fresh talents and good qualities in him ; and as to his Lordship, he adored Flora as he had ever done ; though he did not venture to declare anything decided yet.

Maude and Cecil were only away one fortnight. They were anxious to be at the Castle

before the weather was too cold to give the villagers a grand out-of-doors entertainment. The bells merrily rang them back on Saturday evening ; and, on the Sunday morning, Cecil and his bride were quietly ensconced in the Castle pew, joining fervently in the Hundredth Psalm, and listening attentively to one of Robert's simple but expressive sermons. The service over, they invited themselves to return and dine with Robert. They began their married life by thinking of others, instead of foolishly forgetting everyone else but themselves. Yet no one seeing Maude caring for little Harry, and Cecil conversing cheerfully with Robert, would have thought them unmindful of each other. Oh no ! in her frank tones and his pleasant voice, there were love and tenderness. Robert had established an evening service in old St. Walburga ; and, as Cecil and Maude walked home together in the moonlight, after wishing good night to Robert, Maude said :

“ Cecil, I am so exquisitely happy ! I only wish our poor Lucy's Robert could be glad once more ! ”

“ He can never feel as we do, dear Maude ;

his day for any excess of earthly joy has long past away ; but living, as he does, under the shadow of a heavenly love, he will not be dreary."

"He is so good," rejoined Maude. "He almost equals her now. Oh ! if she could only see him ! I never thought he could be what he is."

"He treads the path our sister trod, Maude, and he is happier thus, even with his grey hairs and weight of grief, than many a man who lives a life of ease, and has not known sorrow."

"Yes," replied Maude, in a subdued tone ; "because he is secure of his home. Poor dear Robert ! his sorrows are deep ; but he has no anxiety about meeting her again : that must be. I would rather be Robert as he now is, than live as poor Uncle Archer did, with all his riches and power."

Maude looked up at Cecil, and her dark eyes were full of truth and earnestness.

Cecil pressed the hand which rested on his arm so confidently, closer, as he said softly :

"Precious Maude ! I would rather be myself now, than any one in the universe !"

“ Oh, flattering husband !” she exclaimed in her old saucy tones.

Cecil laughed ; then presently Maude said :

“ Well, I do think the world is all going right, everything is smooth now.”

“ Smooth as the sky above us,” Cecil replied.

“ Oh, Cecil !” Maude said suddenly, “ I heard something so strange to-day. I only hope it will not reach Robert’s ears, to revive the remembrance of his past sorrows ; but Captain Prescott told me this morning as we were coming out of church, that he learnt from his niece who is *en pension* at Anne’s sisterhood, that Father Anastasio is installed there as confessor to the poor creatures. Do you not pity them ?”

“ Heartily !” replied Cecil sighing. “ I obtained some information, also, the other day about poor Mostyn. Do you recollect him ?”

“ Oh, perfectly,” replied Maude. “ What has become of him ?”

“ Shortly after Robert left Rome, Father Anastasio alarmed, I suppose, at the escape of one of his victims, sent poor Hubert a

missionary to an Indian settlement, where he died a year after. The news of his death has only just reached England, and one of the Ackington brotherhood, whom I met accidentally on the platform of the station, told me the sad account."

"How kind Lucy was to Mostyn!" Maude observed. "I should never have been half so good as she was."

"May you never have to try a similar exhibition of goodness," Cecil replied, as they passed through the park gates.

"I hope we shall reside principally here," said Maude, "it is so much more delightful than any other spot."

"We shall always be attracted here," Cecil replied, "and except during the parliamentary season, I dare say this will generally be our home."

"Home, sweet home! there is no place like home," murmured Maude, "no place like home, and no country like England, is there, Cecil?"

"And no spot like that where Maude is," he replied playfully.

"I suppose I must return the compliment,

since I can do it sincerely," Maude said laughing; and thus they talked on till they reached the Castle.

There was just one bright, glorious day left that autumn, and on that, fell the village feast. The weather was so warm and lovely that there was no need of tents, and well crowded was the park with the neighbouring poor of all ages. Every pastime Cecil could devise, amused them; a plentiful supply of good cheer regaled them; while every possible kindness met them, and yet, though the feast was given in Cecil's honour, he ever strove to put his brother forward, as the rightful possessor, and make the people look to the earl, and not to himself, as their landowner. Mer- rily sounded the voices of the happy villagers, as noble ladies waited on them, and noble gentlemen thought of their happiness. The feast was of long duration; but when it was over, the children dispersed to pleasant games ending by the boys running races in sacks, which amusement was planned by the Squire, who was active in stowing the boys into the sacks, and supplying sixpences for the victors. Shouts of laughter accompanied these performances, and every one found a source of

amusement in contemplating the droll hoppings and tumblings of the rustic competitors. But at length the festival was over, and before parting, "God save the Queen" was sung and a hymn, and then good-nights were exchanged. But still no one moved, and all eyes were directed towards a very old man, the father of the flock, who being short of stature, was busily employed in mounting a table. When arrived at this post of elevation, he begged to be heard; and strange was the speech which the patriarch of Forsted delivered to the ears of his audience polite and vulgar.

"Ladies and gemmen!" he began, "I be an old man; I be seen nigh the end of my days; but old though I be and poor of speech, yet I could not leave this place without putting forth a humble word and thanks to the ladies and gemmen for their greatness and goodness this day. I be seen twenty years come and twenty years go these four times; but never mortal day like this day, when, after gloomy like times, right comes right again, and the Squire and Vicar comes back to their own; and Mr. Erresford, God bless him. a million times! takes our young lady as his



lady—may we, my lads and companions, ever live worthy of our Squire, our Pa'son, and of Mr. Erresford and his lady, and my Lord De Walden; may we ever be true to 'em all, and thankful for the favours all their lives spread on us. May we all be good church-going folks—good fathers and mothers—brothers and sisters, with such examples as we have set before us; and if any one on us goes wrong, just go and look at that ere little grave yonder, and think how Miss Lucy lived, and how Miss Lucy died, and let's try to do likewise! May we ever keep sober, honest, industrious, and do our duty by our masters and ourselves, and hold by the Pa'son as long as he lives. Now, my lads, who'll join old Bill Robbins in three cheers for the Pa'son and Master Harry, and may those never have a happy day who don't! Now my lads and lasses, hip, hip!"

Then burst on the air such hurrahs as almost deafened those who heard them.

"Now, my lads and lasses," shouted the indefatigable old orator, "three good cheers for the Squire; long life to him!"

Loud shouts again arose, women and children not one whit behind the men in making their voices heard.

“ Now,” vociferated old Bill, “ more good loud uns for Mr. Cecil and Miss Maude, and bless ’em both to their dying day !”

Again shouting followed, and when it seemed about to die away, shouts were called forth for Lady Flora, “ the poor man’s friend,” and the Earl, and Countess.

“ And,” added Bill, “ for all on ’em ! Now another for the Pa’son come home again !”

And when these ceased, the bells from St. Walburga took up the sound, and pealed merrily forth ; and from the tower high waved the flag on its tall staff.

“ ’Pon my word,” whispered the Squire to Maude, “ it’s affecting !”

But Robert silently despatched a boy to stop the bells, and presently himself addressed the audience. His voice faltered as he thanked them all for their kindness in thus welcoming home one who so cruelly deserted them ; but, with God’s blessing, he promised for the future to be true to them, and work with his every energy so long as life was spared him—“ and may we all unite in promoting unity, peace, and concord among us,” he continued, “ and by this means be true to ourselves, our Queen,

our church—and whatever betides, and whatever aggressions the enemies of our faith make, may we be true to a man, to our Bible, and pray God never to take it from us, but preserve us good soldiers and servants to Him, to our lives' end !”

A silence succeeded Robert's earnest address ; then Cecil spoke a few words to the people, and when he ceased, the Squire exclaimed in his merry voice :

“ I am no speech-maker, so all I can do is to wish you, one and all, long life and happiness, and thank you for your hearty good feeling towards me and mine.”

Then taking up in his arms his little grandson, who was standing close by his side, he held him high above his head, saying,

“ Wave your cap at them, little Phil, and show them what a man you are !”

The child's fair cheeks glowed ; and taking off his little straw hat, he waved it round and round, and imitating the general fits of cheering, called out in his manly little voice :  
“ Hurra, hurra !”

A loud burst of enthusiasm followed this for Lucy's child ; and when the Squire at length set Harry down, old St. Walburga's

bells again rose and fell on the ear, nor ever stopped until the whole assembly had trooped away into the shadowy village to their quiet, happy homes. The noble guests dispersed also, Flora and Lord Glendowan wandering together across the park; and this time their earnest conversation was of plans for Robert and his sister Mildred, who with her husband and family, was shortly expected to arrive in England.

The young Vicar of Forsted, when all was over, slid away and prayed by Lucy's grave; his brow was ever sad, but in his prayer he said there was "Peace." And Peace spread her wings over Forsted, and the stars kept watch o'er Lucy's grave and the flowers that grew around it; and there was happiness at last in the quiet village, even though its fairest flower had passed away to the land where there is everlasting rest.

THE END.

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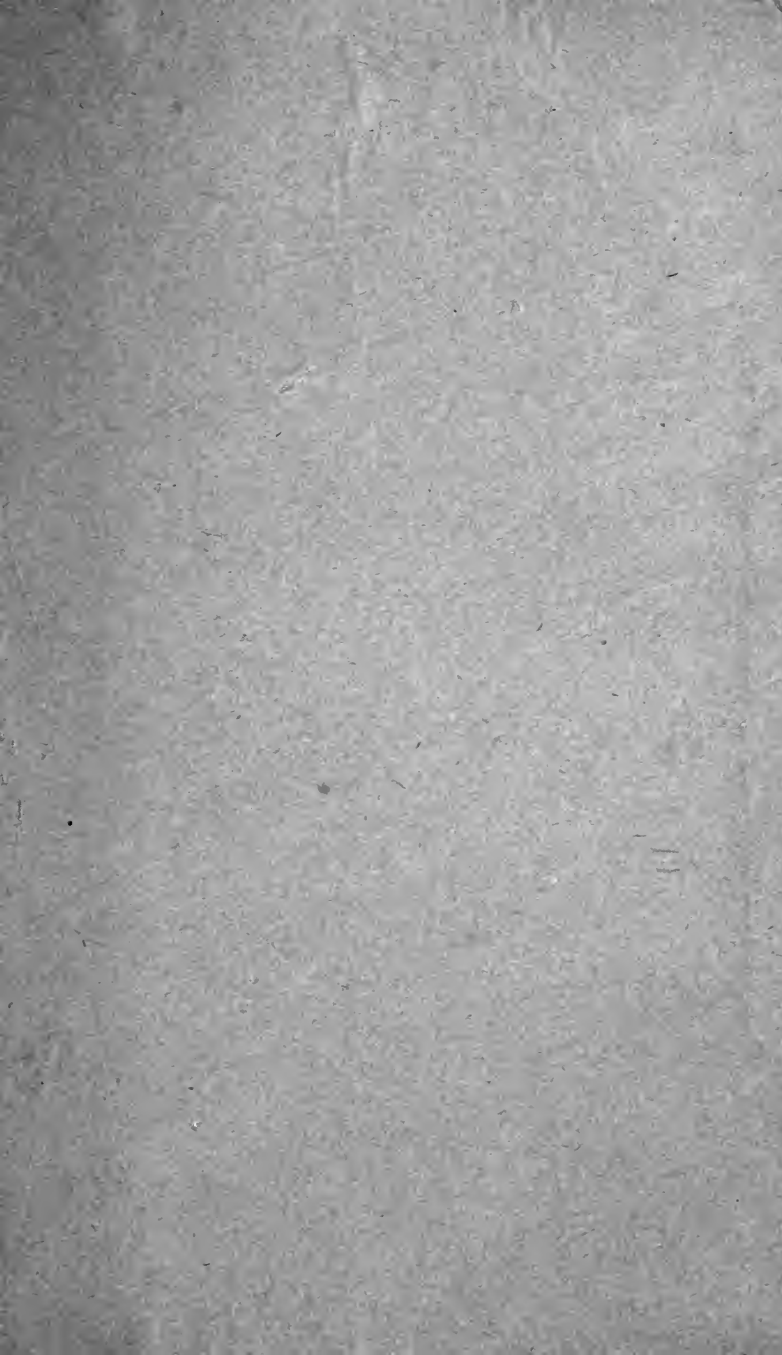












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